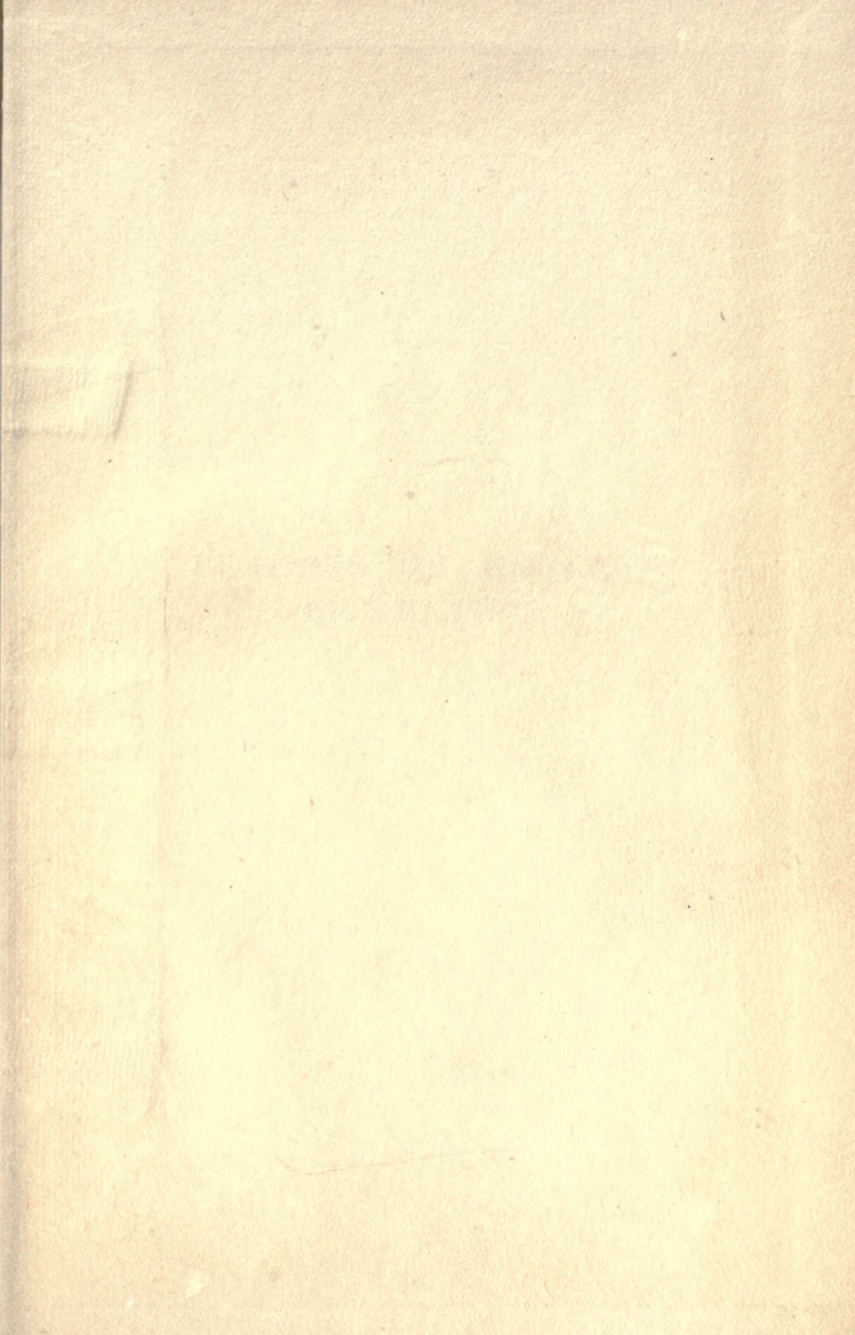




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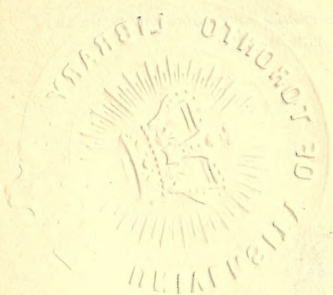
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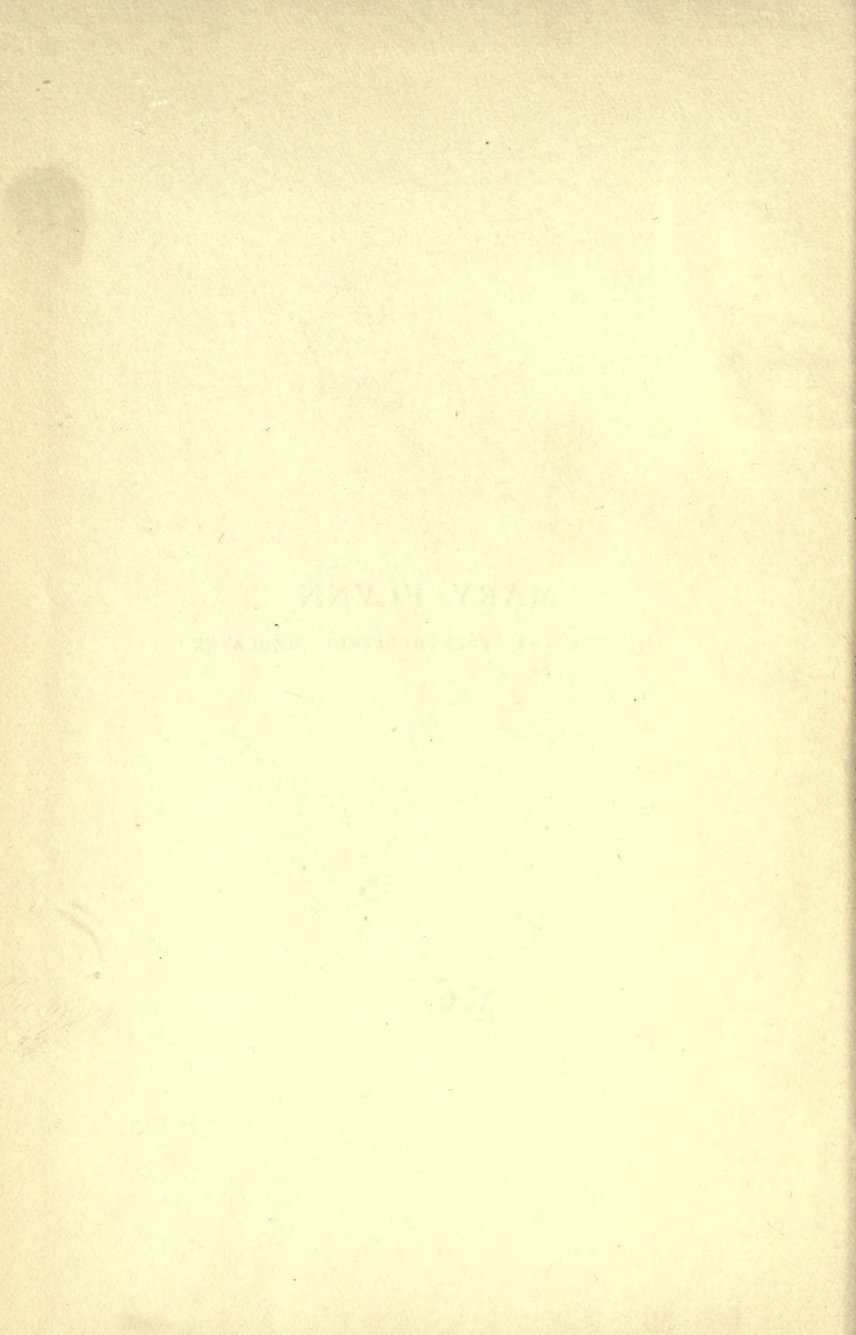
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TO

MARY FLYNN

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



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LEADERS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

IN the series of readings which follow we are not to expect a complete history of English literature. For that, even in outline, a very much larger space would be necessary. Besides, this little book has a different object. Its title to some extent makes this apparent. It is called *Leaders of English Literature*, and accordingly it will touch only on the more remarkable and characteristic writers of each period, particularly on those who brought some new idea or way of expressing an idea into our literature. Over such writers we shall linger, trying to grasp exactly what their ideas or ways of expression were, how they differed from the ideas and ways of expression of other men, and what influence they had upon their own times and the times that came after them. Especially we shall try to understand those great and characteristic writers who were leaders of, or helpers in, important literary movements where new ideas and new ways of expression were the common property of a group of authors, or were caught by enthusiastic young disciples from the teaching and

practice of some great master. We shall, in fact, attempt (as the proverb advises) "to know a man by his friends," and by the effect he produces upon them and their work. We shall trace the friendship of such a pair as Addison and Steele, for example, and see how, from a friendship begun at school, and carried on at Oxford and later in London, there grew the perfect understanding which enabled them to collaborate together in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. We shall see how the scholarly and meditative mind of Addison tempered the natural impetuosity of Steele, and how Steele's quick sympathies and responsive humanity warmed the rather cold and reserved temperament of Addison. As well as of friendships we shall take account of enmities and quarrels, for a man's character may be judged almost as well from the objects of his dislike as of his affection. Each individual writer and each group of writers, with new ideas or with new ways of expression, has had to do battle with those who clung to older methods, and from the study of these conflicts we may learn a great deal. Then, too, there are personal hostilities, and, though these should not, if men were perfect, influence the mind and work of the poet and prose-writer, yet, as a matter of fact, they very often do. We shall find personal animosities of this kind embittering many of the literary conflicts of the Elizabethan age. Later we shall come upon a great poet, Alexander Pope, some of whose finest satire was inspired by what we must truthfully call a rancorous maliciousness and desire to inflict suffering. In Hazlitt, too, one of our greatest critics, we shall discover some of the same unpleasant quality.

Now, if we were studying the literature of France, we should find it possible to include nearly all the great writers in this "group-arrangement," as we may call it. We should find very few important men of letters unconnected with some literary movement or revolution. Nearly all would have friends with similar aims, or disciples eager to adopt and carry out a new programme. But in the study of English literature the "group-arrangement" is neither so easy nor so satisfactory. We are, to begin with, a less gregarious and much more reserved people than are the French. An Englishman is prone to keep his ideas and theories to himself, to work them out in secret, and to distrust all kinds of "movements" and common undertakings; while a Frenchman is eager to expound his views and to enlist the interest of the world in them. Again, England is less centralised than is France. To England London is the capital, to France Paris is the heart. An English man of letters does not feel residence in London and in the literary world of London a necessity. To a French writer existence in the capital and among his fellow-craftsmen is generally a condition of his art. Accordingly we find in English literature a far greater number of writers working by themselves and for themselves, and quite unconnected with any literary party or group or movement. They are lonely spirits, in fact, and their frequency would upset our "group-arrangement" altogether if we did not remember that the great poet or prose-writer may have innumerable friends whom he has never known in the flesh, and that his voice does not die with his body, but goes on speaking for all time. His ablest and most enthusiastic disciples may be separated from him by thousands of

miles or hundreds of years, and his strongest influence may be exercised long, long after his death. With some of our Leaders, then, we must look for spiritual friendships and affinities rather than earthly ones; we shall find ourselves obliged to "group" them, perhaps, with men of such distant date as to be almost of another speech. Chaucer will be one of these writers, Milton another, a third will be Sir Thomas Browne, who wrote the beautiful *Religio Medici* and the even more beautiful *Urn-Burial*, and who after many, many years influenced so strongly the prose of Charles Lamb.

In addition to, and along with, this "group-arrangement" we have another aim in these readings, and that is to study the various writers in relation to the social and political life of their period. Literature, we must be very careful to remember, is not a thing apart; it is the work of living men and women, and it reflects not only their characters, their personal joys and sorrows, but it also reflects the age in which they live and the sort of civilisation that surrounds them. The poet will, of course, be a poet always; he will be more sensitive than other people to the influence of Nature, to the beauty of men and women, to the pleasure and pain of human life; he will see and hear both more, and more deeply than his fellows, but his thought and his way of expressing it will be influenced very strongly by the events and circumstances which surround him. He may find himself hampered by a language not yet supple enough to express very complicated and original ideas; he may even have to borrow words from other languages or coin words in his own, that men may understand what he has to say; he may find himself the child of some prosperous and noble age, when life is

vigorous and beautiful, and high ambitions are general; or he may be born in an age of national depression or dulness, when life is struggling or mean, and ambitions are centred upon unworthy objects. And all these circumstances will react upon him. The perfection or imperfection of his national tongue will enable him to speak his thoughts with clearness, or will cause him to stammer, as it were, in his utterance of them. The success and nobility of his race will turn his attention to splendid and ennobling subjects for his art, and will make his music resonant and stirring as "the proud pathos of a clarion's call." The failure or stagnation of his people will draw his eyes to scenes of suffering or of shame, and will change his note to one of complaint or satire or denunciation. It is easy enough to give proof of this by example. In the curiously mixed world of the later fourteenth century, where the splendour and pomp of artificial chivalry only half-concealed the social misery which accompanied the collapse of feudalism and the grinding pressure of the French wars, how admirably does the gaiety and humour of Chaucer reflect the life of the favoured few, how truly is the heavy and lugubrious invective of Langland the expression of the distress of the many! In the age of Elizabeth the boundless hope and joy of a young and victorious people found voice in the wonderful outburst of lyric poetry which marked the close of the sixteenth century; its zest for life and experience of all kinds created a drama which, if not the most artistic, is certainly the most human and widest in scope the world has yet known, while its sense of nationality and its devotion to great moral ideals speak always in the poetry of the *Faërie Queen*.

We might go on with evidence of this character, but we should only be forestalling ourselves, for a brief description of social development and its relation to literature will be a part of our undertaking. It is sufficient now to have emphasised the fact that each age has its spirit, and that of this spirit literature is to some extent an interpreter.

CHAPTER II

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THERE is very good reason for choosing as our first Leader Geoffrey Chaucer, who was born some time near the year 1340, and who died in the year 1400. Later writers have always loved to honour him as "the father of English poetry," and though it would be a great mistake to take this to mean that before him there was no poetry in England at all, the title is a just one if we imply by it that Chaucer was the first English poet whose writings are still a source of pleasure not only to scholars, but to English people in general. For Chaucer is not really a difficult writer to read; his English is not so very different from the English we speak to-day. Then, too, his metre is very close to the metre of modern poetry. Lastly, he had a way of looking at life that men and women of all times will easily sympathise with and understand.

Before we say more about him, however, it will be as well to look back a little and try to understand the condition of English literature when Chaucer began his work. By so doing we shall see much more clearly how great is his originality, and also how clever he is in improving on the work of the poets before him, and in making use of the devices of foreign writers. Now, up to Chaucer's time English poetry had chiefly been

of three kinds. It had taken the form of paraphrases or versions of the Old and New Testaments, sometimes with digressions upon questions of morals or doctrine, and often of enormous length. It had also expressed itself in long story-poems, called "Romances," concerning the deeds of famous kings and knights and heroes. Lastly, there had been a poetry of the humbler people, little songs of love and springtime, like the one beginning, "Summer is icumen in," or songs of a satirical and political character. On the whole we may say of this earlier literature that it is not very elevated or inspiring, and that it is not very much concerned with human nature. Even the ladies and knights of the Romances are not quite like ordinary people. They are too perfect and too prone to miraculous adventures for that. Also the verse of this early poetry was not at all musical or polished, because the writers of it did not understand the principles of versification or of rhyme. Still, its existence is important to remember in spite of all its defects, because it did do something to make Chaucer's great triumphs possible. He had not to find out everything for himself, though he found little that he did not improve and alter. We can even discover in some of Chaucer's poetry the faults of those who had written before him. For example, he is fond of leaving his subject to make a display of his learning, and to boast of the books he has read.

Chaucer was brought up at Court, and as a young man served in the French wars, and was even taken prisoner in France. Later he occupied a post in the Customs, and afterwards in the public works, and he was also employed more than once upon diplomatic

missions abroad. In this way he gained a very wide knowledge of the world, and also came to be well acquainted with the literature of Italy and of France. In his earlier works we find him much influenced by the poetry of the latter country, especially by a very important poem indeed, *The Romance of the Rose*. This work was begun by a clerk of Orleans, called William of Lorris, about the year 1237. He told a story of a dream, a May morning, a lover, and a wonderful rose, which is very romantic, chivalrous, and charming, but which he did not bring to an end. We find Chaucer making very free use of this part of the poem in his earlier writings. Indeed, he translated a part of it, and he very often borrowed the idea of putting his stories into a dream. He does so, for instance, in his lament for the wife of John of Gaunt, *The Dethe of Blanche the Duchesse*, in his *Parlement of Foules* (an allegory of the marriage of Richard II. to Anne of Bohemia), and in his *House of Fame*. About the year 1278 the unfinished romance of William of Lorris was taken up and completed by one John of Meung, who changed the whole character of the poem, and used it to express his scorn of the clergy, of women, and of many abuses of the time. This conclusion of the romance influenced Chaucer even more than the earlier part, and its influence lasted much longer, for even in his latest writings we find him adapting from and translating it. Besides the *Romance of the Rose*, the poetry of Guillaume de Machault taught Chaucer a great deal. From it he borrowed the rhyming couplet of ten syllables, which he uses so well in some of his poems, and which has become a standard metre of English poetry, and also the seven-lined stanza in

which he wrote the story of Troilus and Criseyde and several other tales. From France, too, Chaucer learnt the way of making verse smooth in its sound and yet varied, a power in which we have seen the earlier English poets were wanting.

In 1372-73, and again in 1378, Chaucer was sent upon missions to Italy, where literature under the influence of Petrarch (1304-1374) and of Boccaccio (1313-1375) was becoming something much more natural and human than the artificial literature of France. It is possible, but not certain, that Chaucer met both the great writers we have just mentioned. At all events, he studied their works very carefully as well as those of Dante (1265-1321), and we find him beginning to give up the imitation of the conventional French poetry, and trying, with great success, to take human nature for his subject. His *Troilus and Criseyde* belongs to this part of his career. It is a story of a loving but weak woman, and of her betrayal of her lover, and it is told with a wonderful reality and truth. Chaucer no longer needs to introduce his tale as part of a dream. He tells it straightforwardly as happening long ago in the lives of actual people. This is the masterpiece of what has been called Chaucer's "Italian period." To some extent it is a translation from a work of Boccaccio's, but by now Chaucer knew how to adapt, and alter, and create, and the poem is his very own in its pathos and humour and beauty. As we read it we are reminded of our great novelists, and see how far the poet had advanced beyond the old Romances.

But, although he loved and studied foreign literature, Chaucer was very much an Englishman, and his

greatest work, *The Canterbury Tales*, shows this very clearly. Not all the stories, told by those merry pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury, are on English subjects; but they are all told by English men and women, and most of them have an English ring to them. The poet begins by describing the party of pilgrims as he met them at the Tabard Inn before their journey. This description is called the Prologue, and gives us a wonderful picture of English society at the time. We see the knight, very courteous, gentle, and high-minded; the squire, his son, a dandy and young courtier, with many accomplishments; the monk, a jolly sportsman, though not very deeply religious; the dainty prioress whom we recognise as Chaucer's idea of an English lady; the merchant, the pardoner, and many others. All of them come before us with the reality of living people; we know them as if we had met and talked to them for ourselves. Then follow the stories, and they are as various as their narrators—gay stories and sad stories, stories of homely English life and stories of adventures, and one or two of a religious kind as well. To hold them together Chaucer uses short conversations between the pilgrims, so that we never lose sight of the group, and in one place he gives us a description of himself as a silent thoughtful man, with yet something of elfish fun about him.

This was Chaucer's last and greatest work. We must now try to see how much he influenced other poets both in his own day and in after ages. We cannot make a Chaucer Group as we can make a Jonson Group or a Wordsworth Group. In some ways Chaucer was

too far ahead of his fellows for that. He is really, as we said in our first chapter, a lonely spirit like Milton, not understood completely by his own day. Among the poets of his time John Gower (c. 1325-1408) was certainly his friend; but though Gower may have picked up from Chaucer his way of writing smooth verse and telling a straightforward story, he has none of Chaucer's merriment or knowledge of character. His great work, the *Confessio Amantis*, or *Lover's Confession*, is a series of tales arising from a prologue, but it is not at all like *The Canterbury Tales*, for the Prologue is an allegory in a dream after the French fashion, and the tales are not told with any great art or freshness or charm. Occleve (1368-1450) and Lydgate (1370-1446) did indeed claim Chaucer as their "maister," and the former certainly knew him personally. But neither was a very apt pupil. Lydgate wrote his dreary *Story of Thebes* as an addition to *The Canterbury Tales*, but it bears no trace of Chaucer's skill, nor does any of his other poetry, which is very halting and dull. Neither writer had learned the true way of making smooth and melodious verses; and Occleve, in lamenting the death of his "maister" and friend, confesses how little he profited by his instruction: "But I was dulle and lerned lyte or naught." This rather ignorant reverence went on throughout the fifteenth century, and produced a certain number of poems, the best of which remind us enough of Chaucer's early French manner to have been mistaken for his by uncritical editors. During the same period a group of Scotch poets were also imitating the work of Chaucer's youth. The most famous of them are James I. (1394-1437), Dunbar (c. 1460-1515), and Henryson (fl. c. 1462), whose

Testament of Crisseid is a really touching conclusion to the story of Troilus's faithless lady.

The dawn of the new learning, which is called the Renaissance, did not see any decline in Chaucer's high position. We find Caxton printing *The Canterbury Tales* and other works, and editions of the poems were quite numerous in the sixteenth century. Young men thought it a mark of distinction to adopt Chaucerian language, and Sir Thomas Wilson, who wrote on rhetoric, tells us that "the fine courtier will speak nothing but Chaucer." Later we find Spenser making himself a dialect for *The Shepheard's Calendar* based on Chaucer's vocabulary, and also using it very largely in *The Faërie Queen*, in spite of the disapproval of his friend Sir Philip Sidney. So, in a way, we may count the first great English poet after Chaucer among Chaucer's sons, though we must remember that Spenser had very different ideas of life and of art from those of his "father." Moreover, by Spenser's time the English language had so changed that no one understood Chaucer's way of verse, and his poetry was held to be rough and unmusical in sound. In the seventeenth, and for part of the eighteenth, century he held no very high position, though Milton admired him and Dryden modernised some of his stories. But when poets and critics began to take a new interest in the older poetry of England, there came a great revival of admiration for Chaucer, and we discover traces of his influence broadcast. Wordsworth and Coleridge both loved "the father of English poetry," and the former even imitated Dryden in producing some versions of his work. Leigh Hunt and Keats went back to him for a rhyming couplet more various

and free than that of Pope and his followers. Hazlitt praised him with real understanding. But perhaps his strongest and most fruitful influence was over a much later group of poets, which includes Morris, Rossetti, and Swinburne. Their aim in youth was to give poetry a new naturalness and simplicity, and they wisely chose for their model among poets the most simple and natural of all. In direct imitation of Chaucer, Morris wrote his *Earthly Paradise*, a prologue, and series of stories; and Swinburne told tales in verse that owe a great deal to his master. But, of course, Chaucer's influence is not yet a thing of the past. It will endure as long as the language, and he will have for "sons" all those poets who love laughter and spring, and the ways of men and women, merry or sad.

CHAPTER III

SOME MINOR LEADERS: LANGLAND, MALORY, ETC.

The Canterbury Tales and the wonderful Prologue to them give us such a pleasant picture of life that we should wish to believe it a complete one. If we remember our history, however, we shall realise that Chaucer's "merry England" had a background of suffering and disorder he did not care to represent or, perhaps, to remember. We shall recall the dreadful plague known as the Black Death, which swept through the country in the middle years of the fourteenth century, and which caused so much disturbance among the peasants and labourers as to lead to their revolt in 1381. We shall recall, also, the long strain of the French wars, and the fact that the preaching of Wycliffe and his followers was leading to a grave discontent with the state of the Church, while that of John Ball was teaching the masses to ask:

"When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?"

Of all this Chaucer drops only a hint or two. He was a Court-poet, of course, and no doubt the nobles had no wish to hear of the discontent and wretchedness of the people. If we desire to read of such things, we must go to William Langland or Langley, author of a poem named *The Vision Concerning Piers the Plough-*

man. We know very little about this William; we do not know when or where he was born, when or where he died. Indeed, all our information is derived from a study of his writings, and they do not tell us much. We gather that he was poor, that he was in some kind of Holy Orders, that he lived in London, and assisted, for a living, at masses and prayers for the dead. His poem must have been composed gradually between the years 1362 and 1400.

The *Vision* is an allegorical dream which described the evil ways of the Lady Meed (corrupt reward) and her bad influence on all classes. Meed is betrothed to Falsehood, but Conscience, Theology, and Reason prevent her marriage. The *Vision* goes on with the confession of the Seven Deadly Sins, who are rebuked by Piers the Ploughman, a mysterious figure passing later into a mystical representation of our Lord. Piers also preaches to the world at large, his chief doctrine being that honest work and contentment in one's station are the true remedies for social and moral evils. There are further episodes in the poem, but those we have described give a fair idea of its character. It is very rough, and is written in long, unrhymed, alliterative lines, after the way of the older English poetry. We see in it no trace of the influence of foreign writers, no pretence of courtly refinement. Still, it is of great interest because of Langland's great power of painting the misery and corruption of his time. With the lives of the poor, both in town and in country, he was very closely acquainted, and he gives us most life-like descriptions of taverns, public places, and all the busy throng of the medieval roadways. Through it all he keeps up the highest earnestness, for he is nothing if not a

preacher. We can picture him as a rough and uncouth individual striding about the streets of London with a keen eye for injustice and oppression. He is the very opposite of the genial Chaucer, with his love of laughter and a good joke, and his interest in men and women for their own sake. From the work of the two, however, we can form a very clear idea of the life of England at the close of the fourteenth century, for the one supplies us with the information which the other withholds.

Langland is not so great a landmark as Chaucer, because he has had far less influence on subsequent writers; but if Chaucer is entitled to the name of "the father of English poetry," we might allow to Langland that of "the father of English social satire." Not, indeed, that he had any school of admirers and imitators. One or two poems of the fifteenth century do indeed take the *Vision* for their model—and a reprint of the *Vision* in the sixteenth century caused a revival of alliteration—but the great satirists of England were quite different in manner from the rough poet of the people, and had probably never read a line of his writings. Still, Langland did break new ground, and all first-rate satire since his day has had some note of his high scorn of corruption and wrong.

We have now to cross a great many years before we come to any writer whom we can reckon as a Leader at all. In fact, the fifteenth century in England was a very dry period for literature altogether, and it is only towards the end that we find signs of anything better. During all this dry period there was a good deal of ballad-poetry written—that is, poetry about the deeds of popular heroes made to be sung by the

people, and very likely accompanied by dancing. The life of Robin Hood formed the subject of some of these poems. Others were written around fairy stories, like the story of Thomas of Erceldun, who was carried off by the fairy queen herself for a lover. Others, again, told of some real event, like the story of Chevy Chase. Many of them are full of simple beauty, but they do not concern us, for we know nothing of their authors, or of the way in which they were composed.

There are many reasons why literature should have fared badly at this time. The language was in a state of change for one thing. The old dialects of the different parts of England were forming themselves into one common tongue for the whole country. Modern English was in the making, but was not yet perfect enough for easy use. Then, too, England was at war, first a shameful war with France, and then the cruel civil Wars of the Roses. Besides all this, there were great social movements going on, not so striking as those which led to the "Peasants' Revolt" in 1381, but producing gradually a very great effect upon Englishmen. All these causes diverted people from such arts as poetry, and failed to give to such poets as existed any very good subjects.

It is not surprising, then, that our first figure after William Langland should be Sir Thomas Malory, whose sole work is a romance entitled *Le Morte D'Arthur*, or *The Death of Arthur*. This Sir Thomas is perhaps the most mysterious person among great English writers, for all we know of him for certain is that he finished his book between March 4, 1469, and March 4, 1470. It is possible that the author was identical with a certain Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold

Revell, and if so he had seen service both in France and England, and may have even died in prison for his loyalty to the House of York; but this is merely guess-work. It is the book rather than its writer which is a landmark in English literature.

Some critics have described *Le Morte D'Arthur* as "a mere compilation"—that is, a putting together of stories from different sources—and there is no doubt that Sir Thomas did a great deal of translating from various French romances. But it would be a great error to think of him as wanting in real originality and imagination. If we discuss his book a little we shall see the truth of this. *Le Morte D'Arthur* is really a misleading title, for Malory begins before the birth of his hero, and continues for some time after his death. In the interval he tells the entire story of the great chivalrous King, his struggle to win and hold the throne, his wars against the Romans and heathen, his manner of carrying on his Court and commanding the knights who served him, his romantic adventures, and his last great battle with his rebellious nephew Mordred, whom he slays, but by whom he is, in turn, mortally wounded. Into this he weaves a great many other stories—the story of Tristram and Iseult, whose love for each other sprang from a magic cup, and brought them to an unhappy doom; the story of Galahad and his search for the mystic chalice known as the "Holy Grail"; the story of Launcelot and of Guinevere; the story of Elaine, and many others. None of these was actually invented by Sir Thomas himself. Each and all had been told before in poetry or in prose. But Malory shows his originality in the way he fits them into the main narrative and gives to the whole the unity which

makes it not many romances, but one, just as a single tree is one, however many are its branches and sprays. He had other ways of showing originality beside this. Better than any romancer before him, he knew what to leave out and how to avoid those repetitions which had made the old Romances so tedious. Then he wrote in a manner which looks simple enough at first sight, but is very free from sameness and full of interest, and also very smooth and musical. Nobody before him had written English prose nearly so easy, so varied, and so pleasant to the ear. He had a skilful way, too, of letting his people speak for themselves, of making his story bright with little snatches of talk. He avoids long speeches as a rule, but, when occasion demands, he is able to write them in a very solemn and magnificent style—for instance, the lament of Sir Ector de Maris over the dead body of Sir Launcelot. Lastly, he has the gift of drawing character, of making his people “come alive” and be our real enemies or friends. Of Sir Thomas’s sources we are not always sure, but we do know enough of the older Romances to say that no man who merely compiled and translated from them could have given us a book so living, so noble, and so beautiful as is *Le Morte D’Arthur*.

But Malory did something more for England and for English literature than to leave behind him a fine piece of writing. By collecting all the legends of King Arthur and working them into a single romance he preserved a tradition which has had the greatest influence over our poetry. He is like a man building and filling a treasure-house from which his descendants may draw boundless riches without ever leaving it empty. Before him the Arthur legend was incom-

plete, scattered, and wanting in form. Left in this state, it might have been forgotten or only partly remembered. Sir Thomas gave it such a shape as to make it a thing no man could easily let out of his memory. Also, by attaching to it so many minor stories, he preserved them for the poets of the future.

Indeed, his "sons" have been numerous and distinguished, though the most famous of them stand a long way in time from their father. In Spenser's poem of King Arthur we do not find a great deal of Malory's spirit. Malory cared first of all for a fine story, and did not trouble to give it a meaning. Spenser cared so much for the meaning that he often forgot the story altogether. Then, as time passed on, the days of chivalry came to be looked on with scorn, as the ages of darkness and barbarism. Poets turned from the past to the present, and the old literature lay almost forgotten till what is called the "Romantic Revival," when men began to look back and see that the dead days had their beauty and charm. Sir Walter Scott, both by his poems and novels, did much to stir and keep alive this feeling, and after him English poets came eagerly to medieval literature for inspiration. Now, indeed, Sir Thomas came to his own, and his "family" in the nineteenth century is a splendid one. There is Tennyson, first and chief, with his *Lady of Shalott*, his *Sir Galahad*, and his *Idylls of the King*; there is Swinburne with his story of Tristram; there is Morris with *The Defence of Guinevere* and many other poems. And there is a host of minor poets besides.

Before we close this chapter we must mention two writers who shared with Malory in forming the style of English prose, and one of whom did more for English

literature than most first-class poets have done. They are William Caxton (1422-1491) and Lord Berners (1467-1553). The former, of course, is far more famous for his introduction of printing in England than for any of his writings. Still, his translations and his prefaces did something to keep the language simple, and he was very earnest in desiring to express himself with ease and yet without vulgarity of speech. He is certainly a landmark by reason of his printing-press, and in his way he did something for good literature with his pen. Lord Berners is the more important as a writer. His translation of Froissart (a French chronicler) is a very finely written piece of work in dignified and simple language, while in his *Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* he foreshadowed that mannerism which we shall hear of later as "euphuism."

CHAPTER IV

WYATT AND SURREY

WE might, without being held fanciful, describe Malory's great prose romance as the dirge or lament for a world that had passed away. Even when *Le Morte D'Arthur* was written, chivalry, in its noblest form, had been long declining. Outwardly, perhaps, society did not seem very different. The knight and fair lady, the tournament, and all the stately life of palace and castle, bore much the appearance they had done in the days of the crusaders. But under the fair guise various causes of decay had long been at work, and the old system needed only the shock of new ideas to reveal its true condition. England, indeed, just then might be compared to a country scene in early autumn. The colours and forms of Nature still speak of summer, but their beauty will be scattered by the first storm of rain and wind.

And in the first half of the sixteenth century the shock of new ideas came with considerable violence. From Italy English travellers and scholars brought back that interest in, and reverence for, the literature of Greece and Rome which had for long been active in that country. As the study of Greek spread among our own students at Oxford and Cambridge, a new world opened to their minds. They gained a new

faith in the beauty of life, the value of learning, and the power of refinement and culture. The old ideal of a perfect man had been "the good knight of his hands," as Malory would say, the warrior who, perhaps, could neither write nor read. Now his place was taken by the courtier, trained, indeed, in the use of arms, but skilled also in art, letters, and diplomacy. At the same time was spreading westward from Germany a new spirit of religion. The old doctrines and dogmas of Catholicism were called in question by Luther and his disciples. The authority of the Pope as sole regent of God upon earth and master of all men's souls was denied. Conscience and the word of the Bible were set up against the teaching of the Church. Thus medievalism was undermined at its deepest and most important foundations. Medievalism rested upon the Papacy and the Empire, of which the priest and the knight were representative. "The New Learning," as classical culture was called, and the Reformation attacked both at once.

We may now go back to our comparison of a little while ago. Even after the first storms and frosts have set the mark of winter upon a landscape, we can often notice remains of summer tints. So the English scene at the time we are talking of retained some of the old splendour of chivalry, and chivalrous ideas of honour and love mingled with new ideas of refinement and religion. We shall find this especially true of those men who had to do with the Court and its circle—such men, for instance, as the two poets we are now about to talk of, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Lord Surrey.

There is every reason for taking them thus together, because, although Wyatt was at least fourteen years

older than Surrey, the pair form a group working for a common object—the formation of a new style of English poetry. Moreover, they were friends, and their lives were not unlike, as each moved in the great world of Court life and diplomacy, and each was deeply influenced by the new ideas of religion and culture.

In their task of discovering a fresh manner for English poetry, they certainly had a serious and difficult undertaking. At the time when Wyatt began to write, no poem of note (ballads excepted) had been produced since the days of Langland and Chaucer. Also the language and its pronunciation had altered so much in the interval that Chaucer's smooth and musical verse could no longer be read metrically. Wyatt and Surrey, who both loved "the father of English poetry," considered him rough and uncultivated as a versifier, and used him only as a model in thought and diction. How low English versification had sunk can be seen by a glance at the works of John Skelton (*c.* 1460-1529), who attained a sort of fame as a poet, but whose lines are often little better than doggerel without any system whatever.

In this confusion, Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) was almost compelled to look abroad for guidance in his endeavours to get a musical sound in the expression of ideas. He was well read in the foreign literature of his day. Accordingly he turned for models to the poets of Italy, of France, and of Spain. From Petrarch he brought into English the little poem of fourteen lines with interlacing rhymes, known as the sonnet. From another Italian, named Alamanni, he borrowed the idea of the satire. French poets and Spanish gave him the measures he employed in his little songs or

lyrics. He went farther back also, and drew upon the Latin poetry of Horace, Persius, and Martial. Some people, indeed, might be inclined to call him imitative rather than original; but by his imitations he opened a new road for English poetry, which has been trodden since his day by innumerable followers.

Not, of course, that all his work is very perfect or beautiful. We must always remember that he was an experimenter, and that experiments cannot all of them succeed. Some of his lyrics are exquisite, and quite unlike anything which had yet been written in English. Here is the first verse of one of them, perhaps the best:

" My lute, awake ! perform the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste ;
And end that I have now begun :
And when this song is sung and past,
My lute ! be still, for I have done."

This sounds as if it came straight from the heart of the poet. He is telling us, we feel, about himself, and that is just the effect every good lyric should produce. Lyric verse is essentially a sort of personal confession. When the personal note is wanting, we are aware of a certain coldness and unreality.

In his sonnets Wyatt is generally much less happy. To begin with, he did not copy exactly the model of Petrarch, and, even when he sought to do so, he often failed to obtain a really musical rhythm. Now and then he employed very weak and vague rhymes. Often he produced lines which will not scan at all (lines, that is, which have too few or too many syllables), and lines which only scan by altering the right accent of some of the words in them. Then, in subject matter, he imitated Petrarch much too closely. Often his sonnets are mere translations from the Italian master

or his disciples, and hardly one of them has the accent of sincerity. They remind us of school essays on a subject laid down by a master. At best they are only ingenious exercises.

Wyatt also wrote epigrams and some satires; but over these we need not linger here. His work in general is that of a high-minded and earnest man, truly eager to open to English poetry the classical and Italian sources of inspiration, and to dignify and refine the English language. That his success was only partial is true, but the fact is relatively of little importance when we consider the fruitfulness of his experiments in later generations. To some extent his failures were made good at once by his younger contemporary and friend, the Earl of Surrey (c. 1517-1547).

Surrey led a romantic life which has been the subject of much legend, and which ended with his execution, while still a young man, on a charge brought against him by his enemies at Court. A disciple of Sir Thomas Wyatt, whose death he lamented in a fine elegy, he had not, perhaps, the lofty spirit of his master, of whom he sang:

" A visage stern and mild, where both did grow
Vice to contemn, in virtue to rejoyce;
Amid great storms whom grace assurèd so
To live upright, and smile at Fortune's choice."

He had, on the other hand, a far more accurate ear for the right music of verse, and with Wyatt's mistakes for warning, he went a long way towards carrying out Wyatt's intentions. His sonnets are some of them quite as artificial in thought as those of his master, but they are all much more refined and pleasing in movement and rhythm. He hardly ever misplaced the accent of a word, or employed a poor rhyme, or pro-

duced lines that will not scan. Now and then, too, a sonnet of his gives us an idea of real feeling and of a love of Nature, and eye for her beauties, far superior to those of his predecessor. Besides his improvement in the use of this strict Italian form, we owe to him two other gifts of great importance and value. The first is the stanza of four lines of ten syllables, each with alternate rhymes (such as we have just quoted from his lament for Wyatt). This metre has a dignified history in later times, and was finally rendered immortal by Gray in his famous *Elegy*. The second of his gifts to our poetry was the introduction of blank verse—that is, of verse of ten-syllabled lines ununited by rhyme. Surrey brought over this measure from the Italian, and used it for a translation of part of Virgil. In his hands it is not the splendid instrument it became when Marlowe had improved it, and when, later, Shakespeare had displayed its full possibilities. But we can never overrate the benefit done to literature by the poet who gave us the metre of *Tamburlaine*, of *Hamlet*, and of *Paradise Lost*.

As an influence the work of Wyatt and Surrey, which is really one, must be estimated together. Both at the time and in later years it was profound. Their discovery of the sonnet links them to our great romantics, Wordsworth and Keats, to later poets such as Rossetti (one of the great masters among English sonneteers), Swinburne, and even living writers of to-day—for instance, Mr. William Watson. All these singers broke, of course, with the custom of imitating the substance, as well as the form, from the Italian. In the later Elizabethan age, however, the most prolific period of sonneteering, though the Petrarchan

form was often neglected, the Petrarchan spirit was strictly preserved, and with the exception of Shakespeare and one or two sonnets by Sidney, Drayton, and Daniel, we may say that the practice of Wyatt and Surrey was not really improved upon. As for lyric measures, it would be hard to limit the extent of our debt to them. It is too various and diffused to allow even of a guess. Of the power of blank verse we have already spoken.

There is another side to their influence which we must not forget. Wyatt and Surrey were the founders of that group of courtier-poets which plays so important a part in the later sixteenth century. In this way they are forebears of such men as Sidney and Spenser, who represent the later stages of transition from medieval chivalry, of which we spoke at the beginning of this chapter. That literature in general and poetry in particular should be practised by courtiers and men of affairs was very important at this time and for long after. There was no general spread of education, there was hardly any sound criticism to regulate and refine taste. Literature, if left out of touch with the keen and stately life of the Court, might have fallen into every kind of crank and vulgarity. As it was, the taste of the Court was far from perfect (we shall speak of that in our next chapter); but we have every reason to be grateful to the two poets who began the tradition, which did something, at least, to discourage the worst provincialisms and absurdities. "Dioscuri" (heavenly twins) "of the dawn," Professor Churton Collins named them, and the title is true as well as beautiful. We must remember it when we pass into the morning and noon to consider our other Leaders.

CHAPTER V

LYLY AND EUPHUISM

THE brilliant promise shown in the work of Wyatt and Surrey was hardly fulfilled by their immediate successors. The years, indeed, that elapsed between the death of the latter in 1547 and the opening of the great Elizabethan movement about 1580, look at first sight a very blank and unproductive period. As we consider them more closely, however, we shall realise that they were not in reality wholly barren, and that they saw the rise of many tendencies, ideas, and manners of writing which were later to bear valuable fruit in our literature. Between the death of Surrey and the first singing of Sidney and of Spenser, the English theatre, as we shall see in a later chapter, began to show signs of its splendid future. During the same period Sir John Cheke (1514-1557), Roger Ascham (1515-1568), and Thomas Wilson (c. 1526-1581) did good service to English prose. Neither Thomas Sackville (1536-1608) nor George Gascoigne (c. 1525-1577) was a contemptible poet, and the former, in his introduction to the *Mirror for Magistrates* (a collection by various writers of tragic stories in rhyme), showed gifts that make us regret his abandonment of poetry for public life. Lastly, both in poetry and prose, translators were hard at work making familiar to Englishmen the methods and ideas of the great

writers of ancient Greece and Rome and of some (not the best) of the modern Italians.

In all this body of literature two points stand out in a very marked way, and as they have much influence on the literature of England for long after, we must pause to take account of them. One is the continuance of the imitation of foreign models and the reverence for classical authorities which were to be noticed in Wyatt and Surrey. The other is a growing tendency towards over-cleverness in the use of language, and admiration of mere word-play. The first of these qualities was natural enough to writers who had few examples of supreme literary merit in their own language, who venerated the classics as masterpieces of form and as containing in thought almost a new gospel, and who looked to Italy as the instructor of Europe in all questions of art, letters, and taste. The second was equally natural to an era of youth (for youth, as Thackeray wisely reminds us, is more affected and less simple than age), and one, moreover, which had only just grown aware of the richness and variety of the English tongue. Between them, however, these two qualities worked quite as much harm as good to our literature. They tainted all but the very best poetry of the best poets in the Elizabethan age with an unnaturalness that strangely contradicts the theory of spontaneity supported by our older critics such as Lamb and Hazlitt. They made men content to express the same trite and borrowed ideas over and over again in slightly different words. They produced an exaggeratedly high estimate of trickery and ingenuity. We must remember that in those days there were neither critics whose views were widely spread and

widely respected, nor was there a large body of educated public opinion. Even the Court and the Universities, which did to some extent represent social sense and learning, only did so partially, and were much inclined towards those errors we have been describing. In such a world it is not to be wondered at that euphuism took root and flourished. And now let us go on to find out what euphuism is, and how it attained to influence. We will start with a few words on the life of John Lyly, from whose romance, *Euphues : The Anatomy of Wit*, the movement takes its name. We shall see, however, that a tendency towards something of the kind had for long been active.

John Lyly was born in the Weald of Kent about the year 1554, and finished his education at Magdalen College, Oxford. After the success of his first book (the one we have just mentioned), published in 1579, he was employed to write comedies for the Court, where his style of wit was particularly appreciated. This occupation caused him to hope for the post of Master of the Revels, but in this he was disappointed. He died in 1606.

A very little reading of his famous novel, or of its sequel, *Euphues and his England*, will give us an idea of his manner, and will most likely leave us wondering at the age which found the book so delightful and so stimulating. We have spoken of *Euphues* as a novel, but we must not imagine that it bears any great resemblance to the masterpieces of English fiction or to the novels of to-day. There is hardly any plot or story such as we are accustomed to, and the characters who take part in it are as artificial and unreal as the characters of the old Romances. They are really only

dummies through which the author may express his opinions and show his ingenuity.

Lyly's object in writing was to describe a young man equipped with all the graces of the lover, the courtier, and the scholar, and the name of his hero, Euphues, means in Greek one well gifted by Nature. This Euphues is a young gentleman of Athens, amply possessed of wealth, talents, and education, who goes on his travels to Italy, where he forms a friendship with another youthful paragon, Philautus. Philautus is affianced to Lucilla, but Euphues (forgetting his code of gentility) succeeds in supplanting him. Not unnaturally a quarrel follows, but the friends are reconciled when Euphues himself is rejected for yet a third suitor. Eventually the hero finds consolation in a life of learning.

Of incidents there are very few indeed. Most of the book is taken up with conversation. The characters, in fact, talk unceasingly, and when they are not talking to each other, they talk to themselves. It was largely by his gift for dialogue that Lyly won his success.

A good many elements go to make up this style ("euphuism," as it came to be called), but the two most important are the use of antithesis (the setting of one statement in opposition or contrast to another) and the dragging in of every kind of far-fetched comparison and illustration. Antithesis, of course, is a device of all writers who wish to give point and liveliness to their prose, and Lyly was by no means the first to employ it. Lord Berners, of whom we have already spoken, did so, and was followed by several other writers, while Sir Thomas North (c. 1535-1601), in a translation from the Spanish, entitled *The Dial of*

Princes, developed the practice still further. But Lyly far surpassed any of those who had written before him in the thoroughness of his methods. With him antithesis is perpetual, and his contrasts and oppositions are carried through every clause of the most complicated sentences. As for his comparisons and metaphors, they are bewildering in their number and oddity. His favourite sources are a fabulous sort of botany and natural history which ascribed to plants and animals every kind of mysterious and miraculous quality. A short quotation will show our meaning better than further description. Here is a passage from the after-dinner speech with which Euphues first kindled the heart of the faithless Lucilla. "The foul toad," says this extraordinary lover, "hath a fair stone in his head; the fine gold is found in the filthy earth; the sweet kernel lyeth in the hard shell; virtue is harboured in the heart of him that most men esteem misshapen. Contrariwise, if we respect more the outward shape than the inward habit, Good God! into how many mischiefs do we fall? into what hidden blindness are we led? Do we not commonly see that in painted pots is hidden the deadliest poison, that in the greenest grass is the greatest serpent, in the clearest water the ugliest toad?"

In this strain Lyly's lovers and ladies continue to talk to the end of the volume and throughout its sequel, *Euphues and his England*, published a year later. To our ears nothing could be less natural or much sillier, but Elizabethan England was, as we have seen, not too desirous of the unstudied and natural, and not very averse from the fatuous. In a short time the absurd mannerism was not only being imitated by

every young writer, it was also the jargon of courtiers, fine ladies, and wits—of everyone, in fact, who had the slightest pretension to fashion or culture. It was an easy manner to imitate, and the booksellers' stalls were soon covered with volumes, either continuing the conversations of Lyly's preposterous hero, or reproducing his style to ornament some other lay-figures' adventures. A list of his disciples and their works would be simply tedious. His literary family in his own generation was enormous, but none of its works has stood the test of time. They were too infected with imitativeness and absurdity to retain interest for more than a season. Before Lyly's death the writers of fiction had turned to more interesting subjects and to a saner method.

But Lyly's immediate influence was not merely limited to the numberless direct imitators of *Euphues*. His particular form of "wit" (or verbal cleverness) could be practised even better in poetry than in prose, and we find a host of minor versifiers following him into the field of far-fetched comparison, too pointed antithesis, and mechanical alliteration. This was the age of song-books, collections of verses by various hands, and in those which succeeded the rise of euphuism we are struck by the number of poems showing the above characteristics. Sir Philip Sidney and his friends set their face against the fashion. Later, Shakespeare parodied Lyly's false science in a great speech of Falstaff's, and made mock of it on many other occasions. But it took long for mockery to expel a mannerism so congenial to a society so sophisticated and childish, so literary and uncorrected by criticism. Even when the more marked signs of euphuism had

begun to be avoided as ridiculous, its subtler influence in producing all manner of word-play remained powerful. Shakespeare himself, to the end of his life, was never wholly able to resist the temptation to juggle with language. It is more plainly to be seen, of course, in his earlier comedies, but even in his later years he was liable to mar the perfection of his work by indulgence in it. Behind the quaint comparisons and ingenious word-play of Donne (1573-1631) and his followers, we can catch an echo of the fashion set by Lyly's strange romance. In prose its influence is more fitful after the first fury of imitation was over. We must remember, however, that even Dryden, a century later, shows traces of it in some of his dedications.

On the whole, euphuism may be described as a disease of language, but no wide and popular literary movement was ever wholly mischievous or useless, and in so far as Lyly's manner gave to later writers a sense of the value of well-arranged words, pointed sentences, and rhythmic periods, it served a purpose. A vicious style, let us remember, is less hopeless than no style at all. At all events, it aims at avoiding dulness, and the aim is to be respected, no matter what its fulfilment. We have thus some reason to be grateful to the author of *Euphues*. We have a stronger reason, perhaps, inasmuch as he wrote in it the first of all English novels. It is not a very good novel, perhaps, but it stands at the source of a splendid river. It is something to have introduced into England the form of literature made glorious by Fielding and Thackeray and Scott.

As a playwright Lyly is not very different from what

he is as a romancer. Some of his comedies have a faint prettiness, but all are marked by his absurdities of speech and his inability to create character. Here and there they contain songs which are proofs of genuine talent. This is one:

“Cupid and my Campaspe played
 At cards for kisses—Cupid paid;
 He stakes his quiver, bow and arrows,
 His mother’s doves and team of sparrows;
 Loses them too; then down he throws
 The coral of his lip, the rose
 Growing on ’s cheek (but none knows how):
 With those, the crystal of his brow,
 And then the dimple of his chin:
 All these did my Campaspe win.
 At last he set her both his eyes—
 She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
 O Love! has she done this for thee?
 What shall, alas! become of me?”

CHAPTER VI

SIDNEY AND SPENSER

WHILE considering the poetry and the influence of that famous pair, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Lord Surrey, we heard something of the good service done by them to literature in general by keeping it in close touch with the Court and its life. In this chapter we have for our subject a second couple of poets, one of whom may be described as the very perfection of a courtier, and the other as the supreme prince of Court singers. Both Sir Philip Sidney and his friend Edmund Spenser are true descendants of the line of Wyatt and Surrey. They have the same love for things noble and beautiful, the same desire for the best of modern learning and art, and the same regret for what was stately and inspiring in the chivalrous past. They represent, in fact, a survival of knightly ideals long after the knightly life and practice of arms had ceased to be a reality. Also they are the chief members of a group of poets and authors who refused to follow the prevailing fashion of euphuism.

Sir Philip Sidney was the son of Sir Henry Sidney, and was born at the family home of Penshurst, in Kent, in the year 1554. From early childhood he would seem to have shown a sweet and serious refinement of nature, and his talents received excellent training at

Shrewsbury School, at Oxford, and later abroad. After his return from foreign travel in 1575, he led for a time the life of a courtier, formed his romantic attachment to Elizabeth Devereux, daughter of the Earl of Essex (the "Stella" of his sonnets), and was employed on a diplomatic mission to the Emperor Rudolph. Gradually, however, he wearied of the narrow bounds and unadventurous ease of Court life, and we hear of his making vain attempts to join in the voyages of some of the great Elizabethan seamen. His desire for an active life was at last gratified when he was sent to command the garrison at Flushing in 1585; but his experience of warfare was brief, for in a cavalry battle at Zutphen, on September 22, 1586, he was mortally wounded, and died at Arnheim a few weeks later.

Upon his own times Sidney created a great impression by the sweetness of his character, his high-mindedness, and his qualities as "a veray gentle parfit knight." Also, he was revered as a poet, though in his actual lifetime he had not published very much of his poetry. It is, of course, as an author that we have here to speak of him, though it is hard to prevent his gracious and winning personality from prejudicing us unduly in his favour.

In all that Sidney wrote we can trace very clearly the hand of the scholar, the courtier, and the fine gentleman. Refinement, indeed, is perhaps his chief characteristic. It is certainly a far stronger quality in him than passion, and this can be easily seen by anyone who reads the famous *Astrophel* sonnets to Elizabeth Devereux. Some of them are exceedingly beautiful; hardly any is without exquisite lines and happy turns of language; but it is very hard to agree

with Charles Lamb and the other critics who have described them as the language of an overwhelming emotion. For that they are too elaborate, too well considered, too full of memories of Italian and French poetry. For all that, however, they are (Shakespeare's excepted) certainly the finest sonnets of the Elizabethan age, and over such subsequent writers as Daniel (1562-1619) and Drayton (1563-1631) they exercised a profound influence.

In another field of literature also Sidney won repute and disciples by the refinement of his style and by his graceful imagination. His *Arcadia* is a pastoral prose romance written by him while in exile from the Court at his old home, Penshurst. In every conceivable way it is different from the famous novel of Lyly. There is, to begin with, almost too much of plot and of complicated action. Not content with the course of his original tale, the author fits in a number of smaller narratives. Events and adventures and love affairs follow each other in rapid succession. Then in style, also, the contrast with Lyly is complete. Sidney knew, indeed, the value of antithesis, but he is its master, and not its slave. He never falls into the mechanical "stodginess" of euphuism. From its botanical and zoological absurdities he is absolutely free. He has a mannerism, of course; he is over-fond of speaking of inanimate objects as if they possessed the feelings and senses of men, and he is prone to descend to mere prettiness of language at times. A very short paragraph will give some idea of his method:

"One time he danced the *matachin* dance in armour—oh, with what a graceful dexterity!—I think to make me see that he had been brought up in such

exercises. Another time he persuaded his master to make my time seem shorter, in manner of a dialogue, to play Priamus, while he played Paris. Think, sweet Philoclea, what a Priamus we had; but truly, my Paris was a Paris, and more than a Paris: who, while in a savage apparel he made love to Oenone, you might well see by his changed countenance and cruel tears that he felt the part he played. Tell me, sweet Philoclea, did you ever see such a shepherd? Tell me, did you ever hear of such a prince? And then tell me if a small or unworthy assault have conquered me."

This passage shows the ease of Sidney's style at its best, and shows also his tendency to a deliberate repetition of words and of sentences having a similar construction. In another prose work, *The Defence of Poesy*, he adopted a slightly different manner. The little pamphlet is important as one of the first works of English criticism, and will to-day bear reading entire, which the *Arcadia* will not. Sidney lacked some of the leading qualities of the novelist—the power of making his characters "come alive," for instance—but as a critic he had a much better outfit; and, though his actual censures often strike us as beside the mark and savouring a little of pedantry, his book is both delightful to read and interesting to think over. It shows his high-mindedness to a very marked degree, also his power of writing on vexed questions, and yet remaining a gentleman.

Upon the men of his own day Sidney's influence was very considerable. We have already mentioned the sonneteers, like Daniel and Drayton, who sought inspiration from his poems to Elizabeth Devereux. We must also take into account the little group of actual

friends and fellow-courtiers who, under his leadership, set their faces against euphuism. This group included such genuine poets as Dyer and Raleigh, but, of course, its chief glory was Edmund Spenser, who stands with Shakespeare as one of the two giants of the Elizabethan age. The friendship began in 1578 when Spenser, who came of a good family, and had been educated at Merchant Taylors School and at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, was about twenty-six. The two young men had much in common, a love of art and letters, an admiration for all noble and knightly actions, an eager zeal for the reformed faith. They also shared an interest in the attempt to produce English poetry under the rules of Latin and Greek versification. This question is altogether too elaborate and too complicated for treatment here. We can only say that its beginning is to be traced in the work of Roger Ascham (1515-1568), and that the undertaking was strongly favoured by later scholars and pedants, of whom Gabriel Harvey (c. 1545-1630) was the most important. Harvey was a Fellow of Pembroke Hall when Spenser was a student there, and the young poet adopted his tutor's views eagerly enough to make some experiments in English hexameters. They were not successful experiments, though Harvey was silly enough to prefer the lame jangle to the exquisite music of *The Faërie Queen*. Sidney also made trial of these metres, and some of the results disfigure the pages of the *Arcadia*. Both young men, however, were wise enough to keep to rhymed verse and English scansion for their serious efforts. Still, any tie that drew closer so fruitful a friendship served a useful purpose.

How fruitful that friendship was is plain enough if we

consider not only the actual work inspired by Sidney, *The Shepheard's Calendar*, dedicated to him, and the stately lament for his death, but also if we try to imagine all it meant to Spenser, in his great epic of the knightly virtues, to be able to draw from so perfect an example of them. Sidney, indeed, haunts Spenser's noblest poetry like some subtle and penetrating perfume.

The work of Spenser is so large in quantity that we cannot attempt to deal with the whole of it. We can only try to give some idea of its qualities, and to say something about the most important and influential parts of it. In his *Shepheard's Calendar* (1579), a collection of twelve poems put into the mouth of supposed rustics and written in a rather rough and old-fashioned dialect, Spenser did not write the first pastorals in the English language, but he did write the most famous, perhaps the most beautiful, and certainly those which have exercised the greatest influence. It is a very artificial kind of poetry under any circumstances, because real shepherds are not much given to verse, and their pipes are rather for tobacco than for music. But it becomes even more artificial in the dialect Spenser employs. "No language," bluff Ben Jonson called it, and even Sidney was unable to approve it. Moreover, Spenser's temperament naturally inclined him to allegory, and his love of allegory caused him to put into the mouths of his peasants much talk on Church and State, and the condition of poets and poetry. Still, each of the twelve poems (there is one for every month of the year) has its beautiful passages. The poet had a wonderful ear for the harmonies of verse, and the *Calendar* brought

to the Elizabethans a new sort of music, more various and delicate and delightful than any they had as yet heard. Then, too, Spenser really cared for Nature, and when he writes of her it is with feeling and charm; in fact, the merits of the *Calendar* are quite great enough to make up for its failings, and we need not wonder at the number and zeal of its imitators.

In writing *The Faërie Queen*, Spenser intended to paint "the image of a brave knight perfected in the twelve private moral virtues"; he also purposed to pay a tribute to Queen Elizabeth, a profound reverence for whom especially distinguished the chivalrous and courtly school of singers, though no poet of the period can be justly accused of want of respect for her. To carry out his design, he adopted an allegorical scheme, wherein Prince Arthur and various of his knights perform actions and undergo adventures representing triumph over sundry kinds of temptation. Learned to a very high degree, he drew upon all manner of previous writers both for subject-matter and for style, upon Ariosto, author of an Italian poem, *Orlando Furioso*, upon Malory, upon the classics, and upon modern writers innumerable. Though the dialect of the great poem is much less harsh than that of *The Shepheard's Calendar*, it is still old-fashioned, and shows very marked traces of Chaucer's influence.

Taken as a whole, *The Faërie Queen* is a failure. In the first place, Spenser did not plan out his allegory very thoroughly, and this results in a good deal of confusion. Then he is apt to forget the allegorical side of his story: he often gets interested in an event or adventure, and carries it on without remembering that it ought to have a meaning. On the other hand,

he sometimes lets slip the story-interest while he is developing the allegory itself. In works of this double kind it is always a difficulty to hold the two sides in proper balance. Perhaps the only writer in our language who has done so in a work of any length is Bunyan, and it is quite wonderful how he blends the outer and inner sides of his narrative into a perfect whole. He probably did not himself ever think of them apart, as it is clear that Spenser often did; and, unlike Spenser, he was not cumbered with a great deal of learning and philosophy, nor had *The Pilgrim's Progress* any model as *The Faërie Queen* had one in the poem of Ariosto's we mentioned just now.

But Spenser might have triumphed over his difficulties if he had possessed any power of characterisation, any warmth of humanity, and any gift of rapid and incisive narrative. Unfortunately, his good qualities did not include any of these. He is incapable of giving life to any of the figures of his story, because his view of human nature is an intellectual and moral one. He does not love men and women, as did Chaucer, just for themselves; he only approves or disapproves of them as they conform to his standard of righteousness or not. He is a leisurely poet, moreover; a quick movement is uncongenial to him. Hence in such scenes as hand-to-hand combats he is apt to be wordy, and to lose an effect which should have been got in a striking phrase or two.

When all is said, however, *The Faërie Queen* is still a very wonderful poem, and has merits of a very high order. As a series of pictures, brilliant in colour and fanciful in composition, we have nothing to equal it; for, if Spenser could not describe swift events, at a

measured and highly-worked-up description of a figure or of a place or of a scene of luxury and splendour he has no rival. The picture of Gluttony, for instance, or of the Bower of Bliss, is something by itself, something that no poet but Spenser could have done. Very enthralling, too, is the melody of it all, for Spenser is one of the great musicians of the English tongue, and knew and practised every device by which to make various and delightful the difficult metre which bears his name. In less skilled hands the Spenserian stanza easily becomes tame and monotonous; but its inventor avoided that, and, even when his story is at its dullest and least real, his poem continues readable for the sake of its melody.

We have no time here to speak of Spenser's other works, of the two beautiful marriage-songs, of the sonnets, of the hymns, and many others. We must try now to get some idea of Spenser as an influence. In his own day, and in the generation after his death, his literary sons were innumerable, for he may be said to have struck the first notes of what has been called "the great Elizabethan concert," and no subsequent poet for some little time failed to feel his power. His pastoral vein found a host of imitators, of whom, perhaps, the best was William Browne of Tavistock (1591-1643). Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* is a very long poem of markedly Spenserian character, and, in places, of real beauty. In the epic, nobody (fortunately) finished *The Faërie Queen*, but a good many tried their hand at unwieldy allegories. Among them was Phineas Fletcher (c. 1582-1650), who allegorically described the human body in *The Purple Island*—a rather dreary work, as its subject suggests. His

brother Giles (c. 1588-1623) was also a Spenserian, and left a long poem—*Christ's Victory and Triumph*. But to go on and give further examples is unnecessary. It is sufficient to say that, though none of Spenser's immediate successors showed anything like his genius, all owe a huge debt to his refining influence upon the English language and upon English versification.

Of his family in later days no brief sketch can give an idea. Not only did he leave to our poetry the metre of *The Castle of Indolence*, of *Childe Harold*, of *Isabella*, and of *The Revolt of Islam*. Had he done this alone, he "had done enough for honour." But he is also the "father" of all those poets whose minds are of the mystical and philosophic bent, and who care rather for contemplation than for the comedy and tragedy of life. Moreover, to poet after poet he has been the first to reveal the wonder of poetry, and to stir in them the desire after poetic expression. Throughout the eighteenth century his influence in this way was very important, and so it was over the romantic singers of the succeeding age. "The poet's poet" he has been called, and it is a fact that hardly one of our great poets has failed to pay tribute to his greatness. Milton claimed to be his literary offspring, and the genius of Keats was wakened into self-consciousness by an early reading of *The Faërie Queen*. His is a mighty household, and its direct work is a great tribute to its founder, though not so splendid, perhaps, as that offered by his "sons" to Chaucer.

CHAPTER VII

SHAKESPEARE'S FORERUNNERS

EXCELLENT as was some of the epic and much of the lyric poetry of the Elizabethan age, and interesting as is much of its prose, the real greatness of Elizabethan literature is to be looked for in its plays, in that great mass of theatrical writing which is known as "Elizabethan drama." This name, we must always remember, is not a very accurate one, because many of the noblest "Elizabethan" dramas were written in the reign of James I., and the fire of dramatic inspiration did not quite die out till the triumph of the Puritans under Charles I. Still, that fire first burned clear under the great Queen, and its best elements are those which we couple most naturally with her time: vigour, courage, passion, inventiveness, and love of life; so there is a meaning in the name still, if we do not take it too exactly.

The rise of this drama is like the formation of a great river out of several smaller streams, and we shall find in tracing it that groups of authors with similar ideas play a very important part. In the first place, there was the old theatrical performance of the Mystery—or Miracle-play—a representation of God's dealings with man, from the fall of the angels up to the end of Christ's life upon earth. This kind of play had

begun as a part of the actual church service performed by priests and choristers at certain seasons; then the laity had undertaken its performance, and expanded it, introducing comic scenes and much splendour of costume, so that it lost much of its religious meaning, though it always had the same religious subjects. These plays were acted, we know, even at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the following century, but long before Elizabeth's reign they had seen their best days, and the interest of the public was attracted by shorter dramas, first of all by Moralities, or allegories of a religious or moral kind, much shorter than the Miracle-plays, and with virtues and vices for characters instead of the persons of Bible-story. In time those were succeeded by Interludes, short plays also, but less allegorical, their personages being members of professions and classes rather than representations of moral qualities.

This is our first minor stream. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century a second one is discernible in the rise of a class of drama written in imitation of the comedies of the Latin poets Plautus and Terence, and the tragedies which Seneca, a much later Roman poet, had adapted from the Greek. These plays were at first written in Latin too by learned members of the Universities; but about the year 1552 Nicholas Udall (1505-1556), then Headmaster of Westminster, wrote for his pupils an English verse comedy called *Ralph Roister Doister*, based upon a comedy by Plautus, and divided in orthodox fashion into acts and scenes. Ten years later Sackville (a true poet, as he shows in his Induction to *The Mirror for Magistrates*) and Norton produced before Queen Elizabeth their English

tragedy of *Gorboduc*. This drama is on the true classical model—that is, it has a chorus at the end of each act, and no scenes of violence or bloodshed are permitted; they are made the subject of a messenger's narrative. It also has two other points of interest: each act is preceded by a dumb show, telling in allegory the main outline of coming events; and it is written in unrhymed lines of ten syllables each—that same “blank verse” we have seen Surrey using for his translations of Virgil.

This “learned drama,” as we might call it, is interesting rather for its influence than for its merits. None of the “learned” plays is very good reading now, but their production did undoubtedly help to give dramatists some idea of form and restraint.

A third stream has to be noticed in plays inspired by the romantic fiction and drama of Italy. We may just mention *The Supposes*, by George Gascoigne (c. 1525-1577), and the *Promos and Cassandra*, by George Whetstone (c. 1544-1587), and we may go on to say that from Italy our playwrights learned to take a wide scope of subjects, and to mingle together the grave and gay in the form of drama known as tragicomedy. This mixture of elements was not at all to the taste of the more exact and scholarly men of the time, and we find even Sir Philip Sidney speaking of it with the gravest disapproval.

In the splendid tide of Shakespeare's plays we see all these minor streams running together. There is the vigour and breadth of humour, the strong sense that “it takes all sorts to make a world,” which is characteristic of our older drama of Miracle, Morality, and Interlude. There is that fairness of proportion

and care for form which marked the "learned school." Last (but certainly not least) there is the love of the strange and rare, the wideness of scope, the laughter dying in tears, and the tears passing away in laughter, which we spoke of as a gift from the romantic plays of the Italians.

But before this perfect mingling came about, the currents, crossing each other, produced a good deal of turmoil and confusion. We see the beginning, however, of the future calm and even flow in the work of a small group of dramatists: Robert Greene (c. 1560-1592), George Peele (c. 1558-1598), and Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593).

By education these men, all of whom, we should notice, died young, belonged to the "learned school" of drama, for all were University men; and, if not great scholars, at least great admirers of the classical literatures. Twenty years before they might have written a frigid play or two, and given their best to some other kind of writing; but by the latter part of the sixteenth century the popular taste was strongly in favour of the theatre. Playhouses were multiplying; the profession of playwright was promising at least a livelihood. And these men were poor. The fact of their poverty and of their dependence on their craft is a very vital one, because it forced them to take account of the wishes of their audience, the less educated of whom demanded stronger and livelier interest than was provided by such plays as *Roister Doister* and *Gorboduc*. We find them, accordingly, producing dramas which are very far from obeying the classical rules of composition, although they have a seasoning of classical learning for the courtiers, lawyers, and University men who

filled the more expensive places. This was, however, only a seasoning. The main stuff of the plays of Greene and Peele and Marlowe is as unclassical as possible. They, for the most part, do not choose stories from Greek and Latin literature, and they treat the stories they do choose with a romantic freedom. Greene showed a strong interest in the life of middle class and humble English folk, and some power of portraying it in his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and his *George a Greene*. Peele touched on the ever popular pastoral in his *Arraignment of Paris*, and on a Bible story in his *David and Bethsabe*. Marlowe delighted in eastern conquerors, in such legends as that of Faustus, and wrote the first great drama of English history.

These men were friends, and lived the life of other young and needy authors of that period—not very noble or virtuous lives, perhaps, but lives which brought them into contact with all sorts and conditions of men, and forced them to understand the power of passion for good and for evil. Each of them by himself, and all three together, form a landmark in the history of our literature, because each by himself and all three together helped to make our drama a living thing, and prepared the way for the great triumphs of Shakespeare. In their work we begin to see the cross-currents settling themselves to flow smoothly hereafter. We have time, however, only to speak in detail of the plays of one of them, and that one must be Christopher Marlowe.

Marlowe is a figure of the very greatest importance, and for many reasons. In the first place it was his splendid use of the metre which decided that in future blank verse should be the natural measure of

English drama. This he seems to have fixed on at the very outset of his career, for the prologue to his first play, *Tamburlaine* (1587-88), is a declaration against the—

“Jigging veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay.”

By which he means, of course, the heavy and uncertain rhymed measure and vulgar comic relief of such plays as carried on the tradition of the older Interlude (we might cite *Cambyzes* as an example). Sackville and Norton had, as we have seen, already made use of blank verse for stage purposes; but Marlowe is the first to give the metre any variety, and to show how it can dignify speech without making it wholly unnatural. His blank verse has not the flow and sweetness and flexibility of Shakespeare's best, but it has great power and splendour of sound. Again, Marlowe did great service to the drama by his conception of character. Not, indeed, that he shows any very profound knowledge of men and women—most of his heroes are of one type, creatures of unswerving and remorseless will; but before him even this much of reality had not been attained. *Tamburlaine's* boundless desire for conquest, that of *Faustus* for knowledge and experience, were in striking contrast to the ticketed nonentities who moved on the stage of his predecessors. It should, moreover, be remembered that he gave signs of increasing power in this respect, and that his last play, *Edward II.*, is, in its truth to Nature, a very distinct advance. In his choice of subjects and his free and romantic treatment of them, Marlowe was also doing work for the future. He allowed himself a perfect liberty of selection, asking only that his theme should

give scope for splendid colour, for noble (sometimes even overstrained) eloquence, and the power of will. He recognised no rules of construction, and lightly heartedly swept aside the so-called "unities" of time and place—*i.e.*, the claim made by the classical school that a drama should suffer no change of scene, and should be included in a supposed space of twenty-four hours. For all this it would be difficult to over-estimate our debt to him. And, lastly, Marlowe was a great poet. Indeed, it is as poet that he survives to-day, for one cannot conceive of his dramas as any longer stageable. A lover of beauty as devout as Keats, he is often almost as great a master of language and melody. His best verse has in it something aspiring, like the leap upward of strong flame, while often its power of suggestion (of raising more in our mind than it actually says) is of the intensest. His whole body of work is so full of promise and possibility that it is matter for grave regret that a stab in a pot-house quarrel ended his life while he was still a very young man.

This little group of dramatists were not only friends among themselves, they were also extremely anxious to keep playwriting to their own company, and showed bitter jealousy of rivals and new-comers. Greene and a friend of his, Thomas Nash (1567-1601), who wrote at least one respectable play, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, were the special champions of the party. It would seem that the older men were even inclined to resent the early triumphs of Marlowe, but their particular hostility was roused by the rise of a school of playwrights whom, on account of their lack of University learning, they were pleased to regard as

altogether ignorant and contemptible. Greene, on his dying bed, writes thus to his four friends—Nash, Lodge, Marlowe, and Peele—referring almost certainly to Shakespeare: "There is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers that, with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a countrie." Nash and Lodge, at least, lived long enough to see "Johannes Factotum" leave themselves and their dead companions far behind him in his splendid progress from strength to strength. We should remark that, fierce as Greene's anger seems to have been, his language is, for his age and type, comparatively moderate. The quarrels of these men evoked as a rule a flood of abuse and foulness which no modern writer could contemplate.

In conclusion we must touch on two dramatists, each of whom had a hand in shaping the future of the English drama, and each of whom exercised some influence over the art of Shakespeare. The first, John Lyly, we have already treated as a prose-writer, and have made mention of his comedies. They exhibit all the characteristics of his famous novel, as we saw, and Shakespeare, we know, fell, like other clever young men of the day, under the spell of *Euphues*, and had his period of word-play. But Lyly's comedies suggested to Shakespeare something more than this. He is, to some extent, indebted to Lyly for that air of fairyland which charms us so much in such a play as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's fairyland is a far more fascinating one than Lyly's, we need hardly say. Its spirits are a thousand times

lighter, merrier, and more fanciful, and the mortals who stray into it are much more like real people; but Lyly had feebly sounded the note that from Shakespeare's lips was to ring piercing as some horn of elf-land.

Thomas Kyd (c. 1558-1594) was a dramatist of a very inferior kind, and he would not be worthy of mention if he had not made popular by his *Spanish Tragedy* the drama of bloodshed and revenge, with a liberal use of the supernatural. Ghosts are so skillfully used by Shakespeare that there is a certain interest in looking back to the playwright who first made a success of the device, and in noting how crudely he did so. *The Spanish Tragedy* also contains a "play within the play," like the famous one in *Hamlet*. Kyd's general want of art and absence of poetry are only another proof that a man of Shakespeare's genius is never above taking a hint from the humblest of masters.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS SUCCESSORS

OF Shakespeare's life we know little, and of that little we do not purpose to speak in this chapter. It is only necessary to warn young readers that a biography of the poet is an impossibility, and that no fresh facts of real value are likely to be discovered. The searchers of ancient records may bring to light a few details of Shakespeare's commercial dealings and of his theatrical ventures; it is extremely improbable that any find of theirs will throw new light on his mind or spirit.

However, we have the plays, and from them it is not very hard to make out the main lines of Shakespeare's character. Not, of course, that he ever lets you suppose him to be expressing his own views in the speeches of his characters, or that we may think of him as giving his own portrait in any of them. Only it would be very hard for a man to write so much and to leave his readers with no idea of himself. Now, in the first place, we may feel quite sure that Shakespeare was keenly interested in life; not in a particular set of people, remember, or in life of any particular kind, moral, religious, or so forth, but in human life in every form. Noble and keen and powerful, as in his *Henry V.*; thoughtful and sensitive, as in *Hamlet*; coldly in love with evil for evil's sake, as in *Iago*; or broadly and deeply

humorous, as in Falstaff. Shakespeare had, in a fine phrase of Walter Bagehot's,* an "experiencing nature," and by that Bagehot meant that he was observant and ready to take impressions at every point, and to gain knowledge from any source. We have seen that he did not disdain to take hints in his craft from very inferior masters, and we must think of him as adopting the same course in his dealings with men and women. No one, we feel sure, was too bad or common or mean for him to learn from. He must even have shown patience with the tedious and stupid and ignorant, or he could never have drawn for us Polonius and Dogberry and Shallow. More than of any other writer is it true of Shakespeare that "it was all grist that came to his mill." But something more than this is meant by saying that a man has the "experiencing nature," and Shakespeare shows this very clearly. He not only made use of the men and women with whom he was thrown, but he made use of himself also. He was not ready to feel and ready to forget also, as shallow and second-rate people are. Life left its marks upon him. We cannot even guess at the details of his soul's story; but, if the plays and sonnets mean anything, they mean that their author had suffered from life as well as enjoyed it. He had been through trials that brought him down even to despair, and he never forgot them; they became a part of his very self, and of the very stuff of much of his finest poetry.

* Walter Bagehot's famous essay should be read by all young people who show the least aptitude for literature. It will not only put them in the way of appreciating Shakespeare, but should fill them with a due horror of pedantry and literary cant of every kind. Clever people cannot learn this too young.

Then, too, we must think of Shakespeare as a good man: not interested, perhaps, in the religious quarrels of his day, but good in that wider and nobler sense that means hatred of falsehood and baseness and meanness and cruelty, and love of all things high and honourable and fair. No poet has written of honour more finely than he, or drawn women of such nobility; none has a stronger sense of the reality of evil and of the ruin it brings with it. He even makes the conclusion of more than one play a little unnatural in his eagerness to attain poetic justice.

Again, it would be difficult to read Shakespeare often or earnestly and to fail to see how much his own profession interested him. His plays are full of images drawn from the stage, and they also contain a good many direct references to acting and playwriting. From these we are able to gather some idea of his tastes and aims. We can see pretty plainly that, as he grew older, he came to realise the absurdity of euphuism, and to think that even Marlowe was too fond of high-sounding words, and Kyd of piling one horrible event upon another. There is a famous speech of Hamlet's, too, on the right way of speaking verse, and in this we may for once be nearly sure that Shakespeare is giving us his own opinions.

Such a man, we could guess, would be likely to be friendly with his fellow-workers, and that seems to have been the case; for after Greene's bitter words, quoted in our last chapter, we find little but praise of him from his contemporaries. The dramatists of that day made a kind of club of the famous Mermaid Tavern, and one can imagine what must have been the play of wit and the flow of wisdom in a company that included

Shakespeare himself; Ben Jonson, the most learned man of letters of his time; Dekker, almost a great dramatist and full of knowledge of the seamy side of London; and (later) the famous collaborators Beaumont and Fletcher. Beaumont, in a verse letter to Jonson, gives us some idea of it:

“ What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid ! heard words that have been
So nimble and so full of subtle flame,
As if that everyone (from whence they came)
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life.”

But the Mermaid would produce more than merriment. The meetings there could provide that contact of brain with brain and that exchange of ideas which are so necessary to every artist. We can imagine Shakespeare defending his romantic drama against the attacks of Jonson, the stout champion of classical theories, and the latter urging in freer form the criticisms which he makes in some of his prologues. But always there would be respect and friendship for the poet of whom Jonson wrote: “ I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions.” The company of playwrights quarrelled from time to time, and had its divided camps and allegiances; but never in any very deadly fashion, nor with the brutality and violence of Greene, Nash, and their party. The personal intimacy of the Mermaid group had a large influence not only over the greater spirits, but over the lesser also. The companions of Shakespeare and Jonson could not complain that they were without guidance, and to intercourse of this kind

the high general level of Elizabethan drama is, no doubt, partly due.

Volumes—nay, libraries—have been written upon Shakespeare, and in a single chapter we must not hope to do more than gather a few ideas of the man himself, a few hints that may be of use to us later in the study of his work. His plays fall into four main groups, which may be arranged as follows: (1) Early tragedies and comedies, revealing the influence of Marlowe and Lyly respectively; (2) maturer comedies and plays upon English history; (3) tragedies written during the poet's prime, and giving us his views upon the main problems of human life and character; (4) a group of tragi-comedies; or plays mainly serious, but ending happily, which are supposed to represent his state of mind as he approached middle age.

Of the first division we need not speak. The second is remarkable for its revelation of humour, not only wit, we must remember, but that deeper feeling which comes to some very wise men as they observe their fellow-mortals, and see how unlike are their words and actions, and how much they deceive themselves both as to their own characters and the world surrounding them. Shakespeare, moreover, in these plays and in the comic scenes of his histories shows an abounding sense of fun, of the absurdity of farcical incidents, and of the jollity of life.

When he wrote the tragedies, who knows upon what sad story of his own he was looking back? He has not told us, and we shall never know; but we may feel sure of his acquaintance with sorrow, even (if it does not sound fanciful) of his friendship with sorrow. He had come to know her so well, to be so much in her company, that he could (as we say of shy and awkward

people) "see her good points." Under her discords, he had learned, a harmony was working itself out, and her voice could speak a very precious teaching as well as break into cries and tears. The great tragedies do not leave us with a feeling that life is vain and without meaning and worthless, as do the tragedies of meaner men. After reading them we are calmer, stronger, and braver, if we have attended at all to Shakespeare's lesson, which is that the pain of life is like the stinging leaf of the nettle, best met by a decisive grip.

Of the last group—*Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*—critics are very fond of saying that they show us the serene calm of Shakespeare's mind after the storm and stress of his struggling years. Of course, it is true that they do not paint human nature and life in such sombre colours as the plays of which we have just spoken. On the other hand, they hardly give us the idea of a man who had found any master-key to life's mysteries. *The Tempest*, for instance, is bewildering rather than soothing as a picture of the world. No play of Shakespeare's is made up of more varied elements or raises more puzzling questions. Here is human nature at its highest in Prospero, at its most lovable in Miranda; here is human nature self-seeking and obtuse, and even vile, in the Duke and his companions and followers; here, too, is something lower than the lowest human nature, and yet with a likeness to it; and over all, through all, is a music of fairyland, piercing, mocking, alluring. The mind which saw all these sides to life did not, we may be sure, deceive itself by supposing it had answered all life's riddles. Shakespeare, no doubt, did come to a period when he could look back over the past and forward to the future

without fear or bitterness; but it is unlikely that he ever supposed he had solved the mysteries and contradictions of character and existence. He had seen too much, felt too much, done too much, for that. Patiently, and perhaps in hope, he could await the end, as Homer must have awaited it, or as Dante might have done had he lived longer. For this is the wisdom of the greatest, to

“ See all nor be afraid.”

When we come to look at Shakespeare as a workman, we are struck at once by his splendid use of all that those before him had left, and by his power of combining it. He took, for instance, the blank verse of Marlowe, and gave it a variety and suppleness and melody that fitted it for every possible need of the stage. From Marlowe, too, he caught the idea of intense characters—men who (as it were) burn their way through life; but he was not content to picture them as representing only one passion. As the painters say, he “ filled in the shadows ” and “ took out the lights,” till he had made a portrait of the whole man, not of a part of him. Greene had done something to give his plays variety by use of an “ under-plot ” or second story. Shakespeare took over this device, and wove his stories together into an harmonious whole. Even from the old English Interlude and Morality he borrowed something, transforming their comic character (the Vice) into the clown, whose shrewdness and mirth and pathos we see in *As You Like It*, or *Twelfth Night*, or *Lear*. These are only a few examples of his gift of adaptation.

In his work as pure poet—*i.e.*, one whose business it is beautifully to express ideas of beauty—Shake-

speare stands almost alone. His thoughts are sometimes the greatest, noblest, and most inspiring we can find in poetry; sometimes the most soothing and satisfying to our love of beautiful things; sometimes as strange and splendid as the light of sunset flooding a distant piece of country; sometimes as airy as early fleecy clouds, or as whimsical as "the little people," or fairies, country-folk used to believe in. These thoughts he expresses in wonderfully varied and suitable language. His supply of words is apparently illimitable, and his way of so arranging them as to get the best effect is striking in the extreme. If he has a fault, indeed, we may say that he loved words too well, and sometimes by his ingenuity in using them made his meaning hard to understand.

We shall speak directly of his immediate descendants, the "sons" of his genius who wrote in his later years; but we must pause a moment to say a word or two about his influence in later times. That new world, which grew up in the middle of the seventeenth century, and which lasted till near the close of the eighteenth, did not, on the whole, love, or revere, or understand Shakespeare, though here and there critics paid him homage. However, since the first beginning of that deeper feeling and further sight, which is called "the Romantic Movement," his supremacy has been admitted, and his art studied with loving attention. Few people (none successfully) have attempted to write dramas in Shakespeare's manner. Indeed, we may say that the art of poetry-drama is a lost one. But all modern poets have agreed in love of him, and have gone to him, almost as they might to life itself, for instruction. Nearly every great poet of the last

century (Browning excepted) has lines which tell of this reverent discipleship. Who else is Tennyson's master, when in *The Gardener's Daughter* he writes—

" The common mouth,
So gross to express delight, in praise of her
Grew oratory,"

or in *The Day Dream*—

" Her constant beauty doth inform
Stillness with love, and day with light " ?

And these are only random examples from one of many poets, so that we may say, without exaggeration, that nearly all later poets of genius have been in one way " sons " of the greatest poet of all.

Those other earlier " sons " of Shakespeare, the men who wrote in his day and enjoyed his friendship, were also a good company. We have not space to mention all of them, for upon nearly every dramatist of his age Shakespeare exercised some influence. Only Ben Jonson (c. 1573-1637), his great rival and his loving friend, stood apart. Ben believed in the older notions of " the unities " (which we explained just now in Chapter VII.), and in drama modelled on that of the Greeks and Romans. He did not care for the richness and variety of the Romantic school, but wished to produce a severe and simple effect. His characters, therefore, are drawn in few lines, and give one the impression of types of classes rather than life-portraits of individuals. We must not forget, however, that he had great power of constructing with regularity and neatness.

When Shakespeare abandoned play-writing, the two most popular dramatists of the day were those famous fellow-workers, Francis Beaumont (1584-1616)

and John Fletcher (1579-1625). Their plays are of a very romantic kind indeed, and some of them have scenes of great power and beauty. But they had not Shakespeare's gift of making the whole fit together and give an idea of oneness; nor had they his knowledge of men and women. They trod in his footsteps, but some way off, and with some uncertainty. Moreover, they did not so carefully consider as he all classes of playgoer. They aimed at the favour of courtiers, wits, and ladies, and neglected the humbler people. Their fun and humour is apt, therefore, to be less robust and wholesome, and their tragedy to be less convincing.

John Webster (*c.* 1580-1625) may be described as a literary Shakespeare—*i.e.*, a dramatist who sought to make natural talent, the study of books, and the imitation of a model serve instead of insight into life. He sometimes produces effects very like those of his great "father," but he wrote no play which is really based on knowledge of facts. At best his dramas are lurid stories of sin and crime, with an occasional splendid passage, and a style closely imitated from Shakespeare's. They are not "the real thing," though critics who prefer books to life, and do not go much outside their studies, have praised them extravagantly. Life is much sadder than Webster's picture of it, but it is much less horrible. With all these successors of Shakespeare we are aware of an unreal atmosphere, and of a desire on the part of the writers "to go one better" than the older men. Drama, indeed, was dying after a life of splendour (whose story is only outlined in these chapters), and by the time the Puritans closed the theatres it was practically dead.

CHAPTER IX

MILTON

WE must begin this chapter by looking back over the great Elizabethan age, and forward over the century that followed it, and trying to understand how these two periods are related to one another. We may put it briefly by saying that the first of them was a period of acquisition or of getting material, the second a period of arrangement or of testing that material, and so ordering it that it should give the best result in accordance with its value. This second period was not a peaceful one, nor a happy one either. It saw a great deal of hatred and intolerance and injustice in England, the death by law of one King, and the exile of two others. It also saw a time—the reign of Charles II.—when this country of ours was betrayed by its ruler to a foreign power, and when, among the most prominent and important classes, all seriousness and nobility and sense of duty seemed to be cast aside.

Even in the days of Elizabeth questions of religious teaching and of Church government were attracting a great deal of attention, and numerous books were being written by supporters of various opinions; but Elizabeth had a wonderful gift of preventing vexed questions from coming to a boiling-point. Moreover, like her great father, she had a positive talent for

personal dominion, for governing her country in her own way, and persuading her subjects that it was their way too, or even a better way than theirs. The Stuart Kings had very little of this ability. Moreover, before the second of them (Charles I.) had been long on the throne, the turmoil raised by religious quarrelling was increased by new questions about the right of the Commons to share in the government and in the arrangement of taxation. The spirit of independence which had led the English people to throw off the absolute rule of the Pope spread into a hatred of the absolute rule of the King. A party arose whose claim was simplicity in religion and worship, and fairness and general consent in politics. This claim they made good by the sword; and later, when the restored Stuarts showed that exile had taught them nothing of the spirit of their people, the claim was asserted again, and the Stuart Kings banished once and for all.

A period of struggle like this, when a nation is divided against itself, is not likely to produce so rich and so invigorating a literature as that of Elizabeth's reign, when the men of England shared their hopes and dreams and ambitions, and saw them in a visible form in their Queen. Still, the literature of the seventeenth century is by no means a poor one, as we shall see before this and the following chapter are concluded. It can roughly be divided into two halves and grouped around two great men—John Milton (1608-1674) and John Dryden (1631-1700).

About the poetry of the first, or Miltonic half of the seventeenth century, two observations are very easily made. It is not so gay and careless as that of the Elizabethans, and it is rather the work of men living

their own lives and thinking their own thoughts than of men living in such jolly and wise fellowship as that of the Mermaid. For a time, indeed, Ben Jonson held a court of admirers and disciples, and "the sons of Ben" were proud to boast of their master. But Ben was hardly a true Elizabethan at heart; he was too fond of rules, and too little inclined to trust to impulse and inspiration. If we compare his songs with those of Shakespeare, we shall see the truth of this. Ben is neater in form and more careful in rhyme and in the accurate use of words; but he does not give you the idea of singing for joy as does Shakespeare, or the sense of the goodness of simple things. His very best lyrics, even, make us suspect that he is following some classical model; they are lacking in that personal note—that something from a man's very heart which is so important in lyric poetry.

And this is true of his successors. Even Robert Herrick (1591-1634), although his songs of love and flowers are full of beauty, misses something of the true inspiration. He is a little too careful of art, we feel; and then, too, his very brightest music is dashed with sorrow. Daffodils, roses, red cheeks, and bright eyes last such a pitifully short time, he keeps telling us. A man's day and a blossom's are only as a span. In all this life of ours there is no certainty but death. One or two minor poets of the same school show the same peculiarities with less talent, though both Richard Lovelace (1618-1658) and Sir John Suckling (1609-1642) wrote songs which are still loved and remembered.

Perhaps, however, true poetry had better servants in a little group of poets—Richard Crashaw (c. 1613-1649), George Herbert (1593-1633), and Henry Vaughan

(1622-1695)—who all found their subject-matter in their religious and spiritual experience, and owed a great deal of their style to John Donne (1573-1631). Donne was a man of strong character and of very intense passion. This strength and intensity led him to despise mere prettiness of language and melody of sound, and to seek to express his sombre thoughts in complicated metres, and with the aid of all sorts of strange and far-fetched images. Sometimes his poetry is of the greatest beauty and power, and quite unlike that of anyone who had written before him. More often it is only harsh and difficult. All three poets we have mentioned as his followers showed a like fondness for odd and learned metaphors. Herbert is certainly the sweetest of them, singing now and then delightfully of Nature and the pious emotions of his simple spirit. Vaughan had a deeper insight into the things of the soul and a greater brain, but a good deal less of the poetic gift. In Crashaw we have moments of the deepest religious passion, but he had little control over his powers, and often dropped suddenly from great heights into depths of absurdity and nonsense.

By men who, like these poets, lived apart and wrote for themselves, the cause of English prose was also well served, and by none better than by Robert Burton (1577-1640) and Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682). Burton was a Fellow of Christ Church, Oxford, and tried to drive away an habitual depression by collecting all manner of curious information on the subject of low spirits into a work called *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton had enormous learning (the authors quoted by him are innumerable), a queer sense of humour, and a style that has fascinated some of his readers by its

oddity. It fascinated Charles Lamb nearly two hundred years later, and echoes of it are always occurring both in his essays and letters. He even wrote some imitations of Burton, which show his wonderful power of catching another writer's manner. Very few people, perhaps, except Lamb, have ever read the *Anatomy* through, but still fewer have dipped into it without amusement at the quaintness and peculiar flavour of its author's mind.

Quaintness is also a mark of the mind and style of Browne, who practised medicine at Norwich, and was interested in religion, superstition, philosophy, archæology, and science. His best-known work is his *Religio Medici*, an account of his own spiritual state; but its merits are fully equalled by those of his *Urn-Burial* (meditations aroused by the discovery of some ancient human bones). Browne loved the mysterious, and to ponder deeply over questions without an exact answer. His imagination has been compared to some gorgeous moth flitting among flowers half-seen in the dark, and the comparison is a good one. But he is chiefly famous for his style, for among all writers previous to Dryden's great revolution in English prose he is easily the greatest in splendour and colour and harmony. We have spoken of these two rather lonely spirits because, although they had no "school" or influence in their own time, they were much read by the men who gave back richness and imaginative expression to English prose after its long period of quiet in the eighteenth century.

And now we come to the representative English writer of his age, John Milton. We call him "representative," because he seems to us to represent its most

important qualities and ways of thought. In the first place, his mind was formed by the conflict of two opposing principles—the principle of the Renaissance, with its love of pagan learning and art and beauty, and its great eagerness for a free and joyous life; and the principle of Puritanism with its distrust of this world and its pleasures, its fear of everlasting punishment, and its zeal for the service of God. In Milton these principles are held in balance. At least, that is true of his prime, though his youthful work shows a predominance of the Renaissance spirit (or, as we might call it, the spirit of culture), his latter years a predominance of the spirit of Puritanism. It will be remembered, no doubt, that just now we spoke of the seventeenth century as “a period of arrangement,” and we shall see something of this idea in Milton’s work. In spite of all his splendid gifts as a poet, he does not seem ever to have felt the overmastering sudden inspiration of the greatest Elizabethans. His is never an “unpremeditated strain.” We feel, with all his poetry, that it is the outcome of close thought and vast knowledge, and that before the first line was written the last line was planned.

This is true even of the poetry of his youth, when his feeling for art, beauty, and life was strongest, and when he wrote the beautiful *Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity*, *L’Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, and *Lycidas*. This period may be said to have closed in 1638, when he set out to travel in Italy. Had his career ended at this time, we should still class him with the great poets of our country, for he very early produced work which would entitle him to that rank. He had not yet shown his power of handling a mighty subject (that was to

come), but he had shown that he saw life and Nature with the poet's eye, that he could make use of learning without appearing stilted or priggish, and that he could write verse of the highest dignity, as in *Lycidas*, or most melodious charm, as in *L'Allegro*.

However, had he now been removed from poetry, he would have left his greatest ambition unfulfilled. Sure from very early youth of his huge and noble powers, he had long set his mind on writing a great poem in the epic manner. *Lycidas*, *Comus*, and the rest were but trial-flights or preliminary studies for this, for no man ever took his vocation of poet more seriously than Milton, or trained himself to it with more care. To his earnest spirit poetic inspiration was a sacred trust from God Himself, not lightly to be frittered away or employed for mere pleasure. But Milton was fated to a long period of waiting before his great work might be begun. From his return to England in 1639 to the year 1658, theological controversy, official life, and domestic unhappiness kept him from his task. Probably we are the gainers by this, for *Paradise Lost* is the work of a ripe and experienced mind as well as of a great one. After long doubt as to the choice of his subject, the poet, already blind, began his epic in 1658, and finished it in 1664.

Its title alone gives us some notion of the theme, but nothing but many readings will show us the fulness and the art with which Milton has treated it. *Paradise Lost* is the finest long poem in the English tongue, and stands with the epics of Homer, Virgil, and Dante in the literature of the world. We find in it all the early qualities of its author. The descriptions of Eden are as luxuriant in beauty as any of the poetry of his

youth. We miss none of his old manner of using the whole field of knowledge to enrich his subject. And there are new qualities and rare ones. First there is the wonderful telling of the vast story, the way the poet places his various material so as to produce the most striking effect. Then there is the amazing centre figure of Satan, with his fierce will, his bitter hate, and his pride that will not own defeat. While Milton wrote he knew the cause for which he himself had laboured overthrown, and the enemies of God (as he would have called Charles II. and his companions) triumphant. It is not fanciful to see some of his own scorn and pride in the passion of the lost archangel. Lastly, there is the music of the verse, and this is beyond praise or criticism. To understand its beauty you must grow familiar with it, but new wonders of melody will come to you with every reading. It is always supreme, whether Milton is using it with the deep sounds of an organ—for instance:

“Dagon his name, sea monster, upward man
And downward fish: yet had his temple high
Reared in Azotus, dreaded through the coast
Of Palestine, in Gath, and Ascalon,
And Accaron and Gaza's frontier bounds.
Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams.”

Or with a more luxurious sweetness:

“Thammuz came next behind,
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
In amorous ditties all a summer's day.”

Or with such ease of movement as—

“All night the dreadless angel unpursued
Through heaven's wide champain held his way till morn.”

The English language has only one other such miracle of verse to show, and probably never will have a third. We must, of course, remember that Shakespeare's use of the metre for a very different purpose is quite as perfect.

Paradise Lost was published in 1667. Like many another famous poem, it did not attract much attention at its first appearance. The country was not in a mood for seriousness, and Milton belonged to an unpopular party. In 1671 *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* (a drama upon the classical model, with unrhymed choruses) were published together, and show a certain falling off in splendour of language. We miss the old richness and colour, but the other qualities are still great as ever. Either poem would have assured its author's fame.

Milton was, above everything, a lonely spirit. The circumstances of his life threw him into touch with the great events of his day, and he defended the cause of Puritanism and of political and moral freedom with zeal. He married three times, and brought up a family. He had friends among men of letters and poets both abroad and at home. But the life of his soul was, we feel, apart from these interests. He does not give us the idea of humanity and readiness to see the best in all sorts and conditions of men, which we get from Shakespeare or Chaucer. We do not expect to find him, like the former, the centre of a set of fellow-workers, influencing them, and influenced by them in turn. His poetry shows, perhaps, more learning and more use of other writers than any since that of Virgil; but his models were all from the past. In the same way he did not mould the mind or style of any of his

juniors or contemporaries. Dryden knew him personally, and appreciated his genius, besides paying him the doubtful compliment of producing a rhymed dramatic version of his great epic. But the poetry of Dryden shows little of Milton's influence.

However, before the century had closed, Milton was established in fame, and the imitation of his manner is constant for the ensuing hundred years. How soaked Pope was in his work can be seen by many and many a line of his verse, though Pope, of course, had none of Milton's greatness of spirit. It even became fashionable to adopt the Miltonic style for dealing with trivial subjects—e.g., *The Splendid Shilling*, by John Phillips (1676-1709). To the general admiration of Milton must also be attributed the fact that in the eighteenth century blank verse was not entirely banished by the rhyming couplet, and to his influence, with that of Spenser, the work of the earliest forerunners of romance is heavily indebted. For the last hundred years his sway over English poetry has been powerful, and has borne splendid fruit. All our romantics admired him, and Keats, in his *Hyperion*, comes within reach of him as a master of metre. Tennyson, also, at times caught some of his harmonies, and in our own day Mr. Stephen Phillips has shown his love of him in more than one Miltonic line.

We have only time now to add a word on Milton's prose. He wrote a great deal of it on religious, moral, and political subjects, much of whose interest has now passed away. But these pamphlets of his show him to us as writing an English style which, if it is sometimes difficult and harsh, has moments of rare dignity, passion, and splendour of sound. The great soul of

the man speaks through it at such times, as it does also in his best sonnets. These were the work of the years when public life kept him from his great endeavour, and they have great beauty of form as well as nobility of thought.

We close this chapter with a brief mention of another Puritan whose earnest voice comes to us across the frivolous clamour of Restoration gaiety. Born in 1628, John Bunyan had none of Milton's education and culture. Except the Bible, indeed, he seems to have known but few books; yet in his *Pilgrim's Progress* he wrote one of the greatest beauty and widest influence. He shows little art, but he writes a style full of natural charm and poetry. Moreover, he is a born story-teller; he can make you forget (perhaps more than he intended) that his hero is a parable of the soul on its way to salvation. As you read, Christian becomes a real man to you, and you sorrow with his griefs, thrill over his struggles, and rejoice in his triumphs. Bunyan fills his book with living people, and has the gift of making them talk naturally. Then, too, unlike Milton, he has humour. *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been the first book read in childhood by more than one great English writer, and it is a landmark in the history of the novel, and a very important one.

CHAPTER X

DRYDEN AND HIS AGE

THE years between 1660 and 1700—that is, the forty years in which John Dryden wrote almost all his poetry—saw a great many changes and dramatic events in England. Within that period Charles II. returned from exile, and for twenty-five years after contrived to amuse himself at the expense of his people and the honour of his country. Under his rule a small but showy section of society imitated his follies and vices, and, if we judged on the surface, we should think that the old earnest and stout-hearted England of the Puritans had wholly vanished. We should be mistaken. It was only silenced for a time. When James II. succeeded his brother in 1685, and attempted to wrong the conscience and religious feeling of his subjects, England found not only her voice, but a very rapid and satisfactory way of making good her words. In 1688 William of Orange was called in, and the last of the Stuart Kings fled to France. The close of the period saw the social and political life of Englishmen much more soundly settled than it had been for a hundred years.

Charles and his friends, with all their faults, were no enemies to literature; but, like other people, they wanted a kind of literature which would suit them.

First, it must not be very serious. They had but lately "come to their own" after a time of trial, and they were bent on amusement. Secondly, it must not be learned or pedantic, for Charles was no scholar, and the old idea of the courtier skilled in books and art had passed away. Thirdly, the young King and his followers had passed much time in France, and had got there a taste for clearness and neatness of expression and for witty turns of speech. On the whole, these new standards did good service to English poetry and splendid service to English prose. The attempt to meet the wishes of the Court did away with the ponderous and over-learned style of writing, the exaggerated and far-fetched images of Donne and his followers, the harsh and bitter tone of controversy, and we see literature beginning to become unaffected, with the easy air of the man of the world. It lost some of its old dignity, it is true, but this was only for a time, and perhaps its dignity had grown rather stilted. In our next chapter we shall see whither this change led, and learn to be glad that it took place.

In these forty years the figure of John Dryden looms very large in the remaking of our poetry and prose, and our best way of understanding the period is to try to get some idea of the man himself, and then to consider the four divisions of his work—(1) as pure poet, (2) as satirist, (3) as playwright, and (4) as prose-writer. Around these divisions we shall be able to group other authors, and thus get a general view of the whole.

He was born of gentle stock in Northamptonshire in 1631, and was educated at Westminster School and

Trinity College, Cambridge. His long life, which ended in 1700, was one of continuous work, and was not full of incident or excitement. After being a staunch supporter of Charles II., he joined the Catholic Church in the reign of his brother, and was rather under a cloud during the rule of William and Mary. His age admired and respected him, but did not allow him to make a fortune out of poetry.

As to his character, it is a very English one. He had our national virtues of courage, endurance, geniality of a rather shy kind, and uprightness, and he had our national faults of want of imagination and lack of refinement. With all his failings, there is something great about him, and the nickname of "Glorious John" is not undeserved. Perhaps his best quality was that he knew when he was in the wrong, and was not ashamed to confess it. He was also a true lover of his profession, and younger men of talent or genius were always sure of his encouragement.

Taking his work in the order we gave above, we come first to the division of "pure poetry," by which we mean poetry inspired by love of beauty and the desire to sing. Of this Dryden has not left us very much, nor is the little he has left very good. His talent in verse that was not satirical or dramatic was for "occasional pieces"—that is, poems prompted by some definite event, as, for instance, his *Annus Mirabilis* ("Wonderful Year"), which tells of our victories over the Dutch and the Fire of London in 1666, or his elegy on the death of Mrs. Anne Killigrew. In this kind of verse he is often very successful. The *Annus Mirabilis* has some passages of splendid dignity, strength, and vividness, and the opening of the elegy is quite in the

“grand style.” But even the best verse of Dryden in this kind does not give us the idea of mystery and sense of wonder which we get from the greatest poets of all. Dryden, indeed, had no magic, and that is just what the greatest poets possess. His short lyrics are, some of them, quite tuneful, but they do not thrill us with the joy that is given by a song of Shakespeare’s. They have none of his “native wood-notes wild.” This is true, of course, of all the poetry of the period. Its most natural singer was John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester (1647-1680), who has great charm of grace and lightness, but is utterly wanting in sincerity. As we have said before, the great lyric is to some extent a personal confession. The men of Dryden’s age were either too much men of the world to reveal their deepest feelings, or had no deep feelings to reveal.

When we come to Dryden as a satirist, we must speak of him with very much greater respect, for in this field of literature he is one of our two great masters. Men of Elizabeth’s age (and even before) had written satires, but at that time the theatre had given to poets the best opportunity for ridicule of their fellows, and none of the Elizabethan satirists is very successful. John Cleveland (1613-1658), a staunch supporter of the Royal Cause against the Puritans, did something much more notable in his *Rebel Scot* and *The Scot’s Apostasy*. Both poems are written in the heroic couplet (of which we shall hear more directly), and both have lines which ring with the true satiric note; for instance, his witty stroke at Cromwell:

“In fine, he’s one we must Protector call,
From whom the King of Kings protect us all.”

During his latter years Cleveland formed a friendship with another satirist, Samuel Butler (1612-1680), who was also a bitter enemy of the "crop-ears," and in 1663 showed his spite and his wit by producing a parody of the famous novel *Don Quixote*, called *Hudibras*. The hero of this poem is a Puritan champion, who rides, like the Don, in search of knightly adventure, and meets with all sorts of humiliating and ludicrous mishaps. It is written in jingling verse of eight-syllabled lines, and shows a wonderful power of rhyming and sense of fun; but Butler's work did not influence the form of Dryden's as probably Cleveland's did, and as, also, did the satires of John Oldham (1653-1683), who likewise made use of the heroic couplet in an attack upon the Jesuits.

Dryden wrote his first satire in 1681. Its title is *Absalom and Achitophel*, and it turns the Bible story of David's rebellious son into a parable of the scheming of Shaftesbury and the ill-fated Monmouth to get the crown of Charles II. bequeathed to the latter. It is a splendid piece of work, strong, rapid in movement, full of vivid sketches of character, and written in very fine verse. Dryden is strongly against the plotters whom he holds up to ridicule, but the poem is not an ill-natured one. We feel that his victims may have had their laugh out of it as well as the other readers. In the following year, however, he treated Shaftesbury in much rougher fashion in *The Medal*, and also attacked a rival, Shadwell, in *Mac Flecknoe*, while he contributed pieces to a second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, which is mostly by another hand. To these satires, perhaps, should be added *The Hind and the Panther*, a beast-parable of his views upon the

Churches of England and Rome, the former of which he had recently left for the latter. The *Religio Laici* ("A Layman's Faith") is not a satire, but shows most of Dryden's gifts as a satirist, his good sense, his fine versification, and his good temper.

With this group of poems Dryden becomes a very important Leader indeed. For a hundred years satire was to be one of the most popular kinds of poetry, and he, as its first great master, gave it shape and planned its road. We shall presently see it in the hands of as fine a poet, Alexander Pope, but we shall come upon nobody who filled it with so fine, free, and noble a spirit. Dryden was above meanness, the vice of most of his followers. Accordingly, he did not attack trifles; he liked to have a great aim. Moreover, he had just the gifts of language and of verse which were suitable. His speech is dignified and yet easy to understand, and his power over the rhyming couplet is complete. This metre of two ten-syllabled lines rhyming together is (as we saw) as old as Chaucer, and the Elizabethans had made free use of it; but it received much alteration at the hands of Edmund Waller (1606-1687), who practised great regularity in the arrangement of the accents, and usually made his sentences end or pause with the second line. Thus it gained in brightness and point, and became very suitable for a sharp style of writing. It lost, of course, in freedom and beauty, but the men of that time and long after did not see this, and Waller received for his work the most extravagant praise. Dryden used the metre in Waller's fashion, but he brought a much greater power of making verse fine-sounding, and he showed a wise independence in choosing sometimes

to let the sense overflow the couplet, and in employing other variations. He is at his best in *Absalom and Achitophel*, but parts of his translation of Virgil have also great majesty of music. His verse always has in it the ring of his vigorous and manly character. Later, as we shall see, Pope was to add some refinements to Dryden's use of the metre; but as it left Dryden's hands, it was in all essentials the standard measure of English poetry till the close of the eighteenth century.

As a playwright Dryden was hardly attempting a sort of literature which suited his character or his abilities. He confesses this, and owns that his *All for Love* was his only play written to please himself. The rest had no object much higher than that of filling his pocket. Even, however, had he possessed much greater talent, the age was not one in which the theatre offered a poet any very noble opportunity. The more serious classes in London still held the Puritans' horror of play-acting, and those who crowded the theatre were either too foolish and ignorant to desire anything serious, or had had their taste ruined by false admiration for the "classical" and "correct" drama of France. Nobody who pretended to fashion admired Shakespeare and his friends, and we find Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), who left behind him a delightful Diary of his life in London, and was not really an uncultivated man, expressing a very poor opinion of *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

From Dryden's plays, then, we must not expect too much. He wrote a considerable number, some of them comedies with a great deal of sentiment and love-making, some tragi-comedies, or mixtures of grave

and gay, some tragedies of the kind known as "heroic." These "heroic" tragedies were written in rhyming couplets. They portray the adventures and triumphs of a type of person who in hugeness and intensity reminds us of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*; and they are filled with pompous and ranting speeches and with astounding events. Dryden's two best of this sort were his *Aureng-Zebe* and his *Siege of Granada*; but not even the best scenes in them give us an idea of truth and reality. The Duke of Buckingham and some friends, all of them wits or writers, composed a delightful parody of Dryden's style in these plays, and called it *The Rehearsal*. They nicknamed the poet "Bayes," and represented him as carrying on the preparation of one of his own dramas. All sorts of fun is poked at the bombastic verse, the terrific happenings, and the lapses into absurdity and weakness. Dryden, who was not an ill-natured man, seems to have taken the joke quite good-temperedly. The "heroic" drama did not have a long life. Thomas Otway (1652-1685), with his *Venice Preserved*, and Congreve (of whom we shall hear more directly), with his *Mourning Bride*, were Dryden's aptest pupils; but the public soon wearied of so much noise and confusion. In his *All for Love* (which has the same subject as Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*) Dryden wrote a very fine tragedy indeed, and gave the world some excellent blank verse.

But tragedy was not popular in this age of flippancy. The men and women who frequented the playhouses wished to see their own lives of gaiety and licence shown to them in dramatic form, and this was done by a group of authors of considerable wit and very small

morals, who forsook verse altogether, and wrote prose-comedies of contemporary life. We may just mention Sir George Etherege (*c.* 1635-1691) and Thomas Shadwell (1642-1692), and pass on to William Wycherley (*c.* 1640-1716) and William Congreve (1670-1729). These two men had much in common. Each drew the men and women of the gay Court circle, and made them even more worldly and heartless than they really were. Each owed a good deal to the influence of the French theatre. Each was anxious to make his work as witty and pointed as possible. But Congreve is infinitely Wycherley's superior. He is no nobler, perhaps, but he had an enormously greater and finer wit, and much less brutality. Both took lessons from the sentimental comedies of Dryden, and are in a way descendants of Ben Jonson and his comedy of satire. But they are really inventors, and may be called Leaders, because they created the realistic comedy of everyday society life—that is, a portrait of life stripped of adventure, strangeness, and romance. Sir John Vanbrugh (1666-1726) had some of Congreve's wit and all his low view of life. With George Farquhar (1678-1707) we get into a pleasanter atmosphere. This whole body of dramatists may be called the "father" of the society-comedy of Goldsmith and Sheridan, and of the dialogue-comedy of our own day.

And now we may go back to Dryden and speak of him as a writer of English prose, in which form of literature he did very important work indeed. Hitherto English prose had for a long time been either quite flat and illiterate, or it had been so complicated and full of ornament as to make its meaning hard to see. With the Restoration came a new movement. The

mind of the age was prosaic rather than poetic—that is, it was interested rather in facts and exact things than in the ideas and things only partly expressible, which are the field of poetry. The business of Dryden and of the Restoration writers in general was to create a kind of prose through which the mind could speak, and which should yet be literature, should have form and rhythm and a beauty of its own. On the whole, we may say that Dryden and his fellows were wonderfully successful. His own prose, except the *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, is contained in prefaces to his various volumes of plays, poems, and translations, and directly we begin to read it we are struck by its ease and its freedom from affectation and display of learning. It has the flowing, apparently careless, grace of the talk of a highly cultivated man of the world. We think of it not as laboriously written by a pedant in a study, but as spoken in some such surroundings of social life as Dryden pictures in the beginning of the *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*. It is, in fact, modern, though the more closely we study it the more we see that it obeys the laws of good writing. Of course, Dryden was not alone; others were working towards the same object, but Dryden is the great figure, and we need not linger over the rest. How vast a service this new prose, with its power of treating gracefully of ordinary life, was to do to our literature we shall see in the succeeding chapters.

Though Dryden was honoured as a literary dictator by the young wits and authors of his day, who delighted to sit in his company at his favourite coffee-house, he cannot be said to have founded a school. More justly we might describe him as giving a bent to English

literature in general which was to remain for a century. In one way or another practically every great English writer was somehow a "son" of "Glorious John" till the first beginnings of romance. Greater poets have had a less permanent influence. It may even be that Dryden did so much because he was so near the ordinary Englishman, and had not so much of imagination and idealism as either to frighten or confuse them. The model he laid down was one all could understand, and of which most might hope to produce a fair copy. He was many sided, too, and in touch with the stronger and tougher side of English life, as well as with the Court and its feverish pleasures. He is like some huge and ancient oak of the forest throwing its shadow far and wide, of sound grain, and splendid by strength rather than by grace. Perhaps as an influence (as an influence only, remember) he is one of our greatest landmarks. The breadth and length of his shadow is apparent, if we recall his influence over three such different men as Pope, Gray, and Keats.

CHAPTER XI

ADDISON, STEELE, AND DEFOE *

CERTAIN writers have spoken of the reign of Queen Anne as if it were a sort of golden age of literature. This view is, perhaps, an exaggeration; but the period is certainly the most fruitful since the days of Shakespeare, and it saw literature once more established upon a wide foundation—that is, the best works were no longer produced with a view to pleasing a narrow circle or a particular class, but were intended to interest society at large. Much of the stress and strife which had made the seventeenth century so stormy a period had been settled by the constitutional arrangement which gave the throne to William and Mary. To some extent, too, the old religious quarrels were dying down. Accordingly, men had more time for intellectual recreation, and were freer to criticise a piece of writing without stopping to ask themselves how far its author agreed with their political or theological opinions. The result of all this was a literature of remarkable good sense, moderation, and taste; not a very imaginative literature, nor very rich in the noblest poetry,

* The author would suggest that young readers should be encouraged, in connection with these chapters, to become acquainted with Thackeray's *English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*. No more fascinating character-studies have ever been written, and none more likely to stimulate an interest in literature.

but one we must always respect, and, in many of its examples, whole-heartedly admire. Almost entirely the men who produced it were Londoners of one class or another—men accustomed to be near and to see the great world, if not actually of it, and to meet each other with frequency. This accounts for two peculiarities—first, the easy and urbane tone of most of the writing of this time; secondly, the number and importance of literary friendships and quarrels.

We begin our chapter with one of these friendships, which may be said to be the most fruitful since that famous one of Sidney and Spenser, and our pair of friends are Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729). They were of the same age, we must notice, and as boys they were at the same school, the Charterhouse, which was then (and for long afterwards) in London. Quite young the lads grew to love one another, and quite young also they showed the bent of their characters. Steele, of Irish blood, had nearly every virtue and failing which marks the Irish character. He was warm-hearted and generous, quick-witted and humorous; on the other hand, he had no gift of application, was amazingly thriftless, and, though his sympathy was always on the side of the good, he had little power of resisting temptation to evil. Addison's was quite a different temperament. Among the men of his age he stands out by his high-mindedness, his freedom from vulgar prejudice, his intellectual good-breeding, and his keen and humorous observation of life. He was, in fact, a very "perfect" person, with, perhaps, a little of the coldness that goes very often with perfection.

The two friends showed their qualities when they went on from school to Oxford, Steele leaving without a degree, while Addison attained a Fellowship at Magdalen, in whose grounds a walk still bears his name. Steele went to London, entered a regiment of the Guards, and formed acquaintance with various wits and writers. In 1701 he wrote a religious work entitled *The Christian Hero*, and began also his career as a playwright. Of his comedies we need not say much. They are (like all his writings) of excellent moral tone, but they are neither very funny nor very dramatic. He did not, indeed, "find his feet," as we say, till he hit upon the idea of *The Tatler*, a sort of newspaper which appeared three times a week, and contained political and social letters, and the first of those essays by which the names of Addison and Steele were made famous. We must not think of it as at all resembling the newspapers of to-day. Journalism was in a very elementary stage, and the political side of *The Tatler* was not very important. Its appeal to readers lay in the essays, which in time became the principal item, and dealt with all manner of subjects—the foibles and fads of the fashionable world, literature, points of morality and conduct, sketches of character, and so on. At first Steele wrote the papers himself, but later Addison, who was not now in London, began to contribute, and wrote forty-two of them, while in thirty-six the friends worked together. The total number written by Steele alone is very large—nearly two hundred—and Dean Swift was responsible for a few.

Before this Addison had become an important and successful man. He had left Oxford, had travelled in Italy, and had written one or two accomplished but

not very successful books, when his chance came. In 1703 Marlborough won the great victory of Blenheim, and the Whigs, the war party of that day, were anxious to have it celebrated in verse. The task was offered to Addison, who produced *The Campaign*, which conquered London as brilliantly as Marlborough had conquered the French, and procured for its author place, fame, and the beginning of wealth. He was actually unaware that his friend was the proprietor of *The Tatler*, but guessed from the style that the essays could be by no other hand. At the beginning of 1711 *The Tatler* was brought to a conclusion (it had been begun in 1709), and a little later *The Spectator* was started. It ran for only about two years, but no journal has ever been so famous, and justly so. In the new venture Addison had a much greater share, and it is fair to say that Mr. Spectator, the quiet, observant, and humorous gentleman who is the supposed author of so many of the papers, is a portrait of him. Around this central figure are grouped the members of an imaginary club—the sensible citizen, the elderly dandy, the retired soldier, the lawyer, and the country squire, Sir Roger de Coverley, simple, kindly, and sweet-natured, a character-study of the greatest beauty and tenderness. As Addison described the old gentleman, we may feel sure that tears were never very far behind his smile. Had he done this alone his name would still have been a great one among our writers. But he did much more. Not all the papers by any means deal with good Sir Roger and his friends. Some are almost short stories, some ridicule gently the ignorance and silliness of society women, some are supposed letters from faddists and cranks of every kind; in others

Addison shows his great gifts as a critic of literature, or preaches a sermon on some question of morality. Steele wrote also, of course; in fact, by working much together and by perfect sympathy, the pair came at last to write a style so much alike that it is often hard to tell the work of one from that of the other. If one can detect differences at all, they are to be looked for in Steele's occasional lapses from correctness and his greater fondness for sentiment. An interesting point in this famous collaboration is the influence of the warm and human temperament of Steele upon his friend's colder character. Steele could never have written the *Coverley* papers by himself, but Addison could not have written them without him.

The object of *The Spectator* was, by Addison's own confession, moral as well as literary: it aimed at instruction as well as amusement. Its gentle ridicule of feminine vanity and folly was not the result of a spiteful desire to tease, but of a belief that women should have some nobler occupation than loitering over cards, gossip, or fancywork. The voice of Addison and Steele, indeed, is always on the side of a serious and healthy view of life, and their writing represents the best side of the England of their day. In the way of literature their undertaking was a very important and fruitful one. Others before them had written essays, of course; but they gave to the essay a greater width of subject and the easy charm of well-bred talk. They made it a personal thing—that is, they employed it as a means not of expressing common-places, but of revealing those ideas, fancies, and feelings which are a man's very own. Also, they did a great work by such sketches of character as Sir Roger and his com-

panions, because the novelists of the future found there a model upon which to work in their portraits of men and women. We may say, indeed, that their influence has been boundless, for ever since their day all English essay-writers have been in their debt, and in the essay English literature has been very rich.

The Spectator was followed by several other ventures, none of which had any great success. Addison attained high rank in the service of the State, made a fine marriage, and by his classical blank verse tragedy *Cato* won applause from all parties and all critics. Like Dryden, he became the literary dictator of London, and like Dryden also, he was generous in his appreciation of younger men. Pope, whom he had early recognised as a genius and befriended, sneered at him later in a well-known satire; but not even Pope could find anything very terrible to say. At worst, Addison was a little cold and critical; his real nobility and greatness nobody doubted.

Poor Steele did not end so splendidly, though he survived his friend by ten years. He had not in him the makings of a successful man; he was too fond of display, of wine, of good company, and of idleness, and too careless about practical things for that. All his life long he lived without system, and, even in his wealthiest days, from hand to mouth. His literary activities were pretty numerous, but none of them was so successful as the work done by him in fellowship with the friend of his boyhood. Later a certain estrangement grew up between them, but it did not really do away with the old affection, and Steele loved his old schoolmate to the end. He himself eventually left London, and died while in retirement on a small

property in Wales in 1729. As a writer he will live always by his work in *The Tatler* and *Spectator*, by his happy sense of fun, his enjoyment of pleasure, his readiness to sympathise with sorrow and affection, and his real zeal for goodness. With all his faults, he was certainly right-minded, and we must always remember that he was brave enough to stand out against duelling in a day when the duel was a part of the fashionable man's code of honour. To see him at his best, one should read his account of his father's death, or the exquisite papers which describe a happy English family and their sudden affliction.

Addison and Steele attached themselves politically to the Whig party—that is, to the party who wished to abide by the Revolution of 1688, with its establishment of a limited and constitutional monarchy, and who were opposed to the return of either James II. or his son. Their best work, however, was not done in political journalism at all, and this class of writing was, as a rule, carried on by a much lower type of person. Of this rather disreputable company of hack-writers Daniel Defoe (1661-1731) was fairly representative. He was of mean birth and small education, and took to the pen for a living after various commercial failures. A man without strong convictions, he first of all served the Whigs till his skit on the High Church party—*A Short Way with the Dissenters*—got him into the pillory and prison. Later we find him acting as a spy and newsgetter for the Tory Harley. In general, he does not appear to have been either scrupulous or principled. But we are not interested here in his character; we only wish to see the kind of man whom Pope made merry over as a dweller in Grub

Street, and we have a further interest in Defoe because some of his writings make him an important landmark in the history of the English novel. We mean, of course, his *Robinson Crusoe* and other works of fiction. Hitherto the novel had been almost entirely romantic, and no novel-reader could easily persuade himself that the events described had really happened. With Defoe it is exactly the reverse, and in reading any of his stories it is difficult to persuade ourselves that we are not dealing with a narrative of fact. The author has no imagination in the highest sense of the term, and he has no power of drawing living character, but he has a gift of accumulating trifling detail and using it in a very telling way. *Robinson Crusoe* is hard to disbelieve in just on this account, and the same is true of *A Journal of the Plague Year*, of *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and the rest. This "realism" of Defoe's was as helpful to the making of the perfect novel later on as was the sympathetic character work of Addison. Pope, as we have said, mocked at him; Swift did the same; Addison and Steele knew him only as a bookseller's hack, low journalist, and hanger-on of their friend Harley. Not one of these men would have sat at table with him, or dreamed of treating him in any way as an equal. Yet, in his fashion, he was to be as influential as they. He is one of the fathers of the English novel, and therefore among his "sons" he counts Fielding and Thackeray and a score of other great writers.

CHAPTER XII

SWIFT AND POPE

WE might say that nearly all the best literature of England in the early eighteenth century was, in one way or another, an attack upon cant and falsehood and affectation. Literature, in fact, took her share in the general work of purification and reformation which was needful after the licence of the Restoration. But whereas the pair of friends, of whom we spoke in our last chapter, tried to do away with vice and folly by laughing at them, the two of whom we are about to talk dealt with them in a much sterner fashion. Tolerance and gentleness are not characteristic of Alexander Pope (1688-1744); and Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) allowed his loathing and contempt for evil and meanness to poison his mind and darken the sunshine of a naturally lovable nature. With each of them as writer we feel that his strongest impulse came from hatred and scorn. They are like the later poet, of whom a great critic wrote that he had all other gifts, but wanted love.

Yet these two men were remarkable, not only for their true affection for one another, but also for the number and value of their other friendships. In an age of clever and distinguished men they moved in the cleverest and most distinguished company. Each of

them had his own way to make in the world, Swift having been born of poor, though gentle, parents, and Pope's father being a well-to-do and respectable tradesman, who adhered to the Catholic faith, in those days a great worldly disadvantage for an Englishman. Neither was of strong bodily health. Pope, indeed, was undersized and deformed, and suffered so much that he wrote of his life as a "long disease"; while Swift for long endured agonies from some malady of the ear, which eventually reached his brain, and drove him to madness. Yet in both burned a clear and vigorous spirit.

Pope early attracted the interest of clever people, and as quite a lad made friends with Wycherley, then an elderly man; with Addison, Steele, and most of the other "wits" and writers. He was not exactly a scholar, but was a great reader in several languages and of all kinds of books. Moreover, his literary gifts became ripe at a very early age, and his first poems, *Six Pastorals* (1709), show no signs of the amateur. They do not show much real understanding of Nature either, but they flow in pleasant, tuneful verse, and the same can be said of his *Windsor Forest* (1713). In his *Rape of the Lock* (1712) he gave surer evidence of his wonderful genius. The little poem was intended to reconcile two fashionable families in a foolish quarrel, and is as nearly perfect as anything of the kind could be. It belongs to the class known as "mock-heroic," because they treat a trifling or ridiculous subject with epic seriousness, and it shows Pope's wonderful daintiness of fancy and exquisite workmanship better, perhaps, than any of his other works. "Mock-heroics" were fashionable just then, in an age when men thought it undignified to show their deeper feelings; but none of

them equals this delightful piece of airy fooling and wit. In *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) Pope had already let the world see that he could write lines whose clearness and point made them cling to the memory. The poem is confused in substance, and contains nothing very original. Pope was not a thinker, and was far less successful in treating of literature and philosophy than in observing the weaknesses, follies, and vices of the fashionable world. With his *Essay on Criticism* we may rank his much later *Essay on Man* (1733), an attempt to versify the religious teaching of his friend Bolingbroke. In both these works, however, the poet's mastery of metre and language and his brilliant wit have produced a greater effect than the thought contained in them really deserves.

The most important work of Pope's earlier and middle years, however, was his translation of the *Iliad*, the great Greek epic of Homer. Before he began the undertaking he was already a firm friend of Swift's, and the latter, who just then seemed to have a great career before him, gave the scheme his most loyal and devoted support. Swift came to the front rather rapidly, and after an unpromising youth. He succeeded only very moderately in his University course at Trinity College, Dublin, was for a time secretary to Sir William Temple (1628-1699), himself no mean man of letters, and, after taking Orders, held the small Irish living of Laracor. He began his life as an author by attempting serious poetry, but Dryden (a cousin of his) discouraged him, and he had probably cleverness enough to see that he lacked the essential gifts for such work. Turning his attention to prose, he wrote (1696-97) his *Tale of a Tub*, an allegorical satire upon the Catholics, Anglicans, and Dissenters. Though full of

bitter humour, the book is not, to our notions, very satisfying reading, and it certainly does not give us the idea that its writer was either spiritual or reverent. It was published in 1704, and its spirit of general mockery was one of the causes which kept Swift out of the English bishopric he coveted. At about the same time he wrote *The Battle of the Books*, a short prose "mock-heroic," on a quarrel then raging as to the comparative merits of ancient and modern authors. It has a certain humour, but the Swift of these early writings is very, very far from the brilliant, if cruel, satirist of later days.

Already, during the latter part of his stay with Temple, who at first had treated him as a menial, and thus done much to embitter his proud spirit, he had made the acquaintance of prominent statesmen. In 1710, being in London as the agent of the Irish Church, he made friends with Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, the brilliant, but erratic, leader of the Tory party, which was then in power. With this party, and with their intrigues for the return of the Old Pretender (son of James II.), Swift threw in his lot. It was a mistaken choice, as it turned out, but it gave him a period of remarkable splendour and success. During this time he wrote the delightful letters known as *The Journal to Stella*, to Miss Esther Johnson, and we must go to its pages to realise the best of his character, the tenderness that won and kept for him the love of more than one woman, the humour of a gentler and more human kind than is revealed by his formal writings, the devotion to friends that made him so loyal a helper to Pope, so devoted a companion to Gay and Arbuthnot and Parnell. There are hints of the darker side of his character, too, in the *Journal*. We can guess at his

overbearing pride, at his bitterness of spirit, his contempt for the mass of his fellows, and the vein of real cruelty which was strong in him. Still, if we are to like Swift as a man (to love him, perhaps, is impossible), and to tolerate him as a writer, the *Journal* is indispensable.

We can now see in how capital a position was Swift to further Pope's great undertaking. Right and left he insisted that his friends and acquaintance should become subscribers for copies, and it is largely due to him that by it Pope realised the splendid reward of ten thousand pounds. It is pathetic to think that by the time the work was issued Swift's fine prospects had vanished, the Tory party was ruined, and Bolingbroke was an exile. The end of all his hopes and ambitions was the Deanery of St. Patrick's, Dublin, a post very, very far below what he deemed worthy of his merits. He had certainly served his political friends well, and much of his most pointed and brilliant writing was done in their cause. Had their schemes prospered, he might have become an Archbishop; but the death of Anne and the peaceful accession of George I. dealt them a fatal blow.

And now a word or two on Pope's *Homer*. It is not very like the original, of course. *Homer* is simple, direct, and unornate, and Pope, a true child of his age, is mannered, elegant, and smooth. For all that, it is a fine thing to read; it goes with a splendid swing, and the speeches are, many of them, masterpieces of versified eloquence. As in all his important work, Pope uses the heroic couplet, so altering Dryden's use of it as to do away with much of its variety, but to give it far more neatness and point. We must all respect, moreover, the endurance and patience which

enables the weak and sickly creature to carry out a performance that must often have been intensely wearisome. Later he translated the *Odyssey* (Homer's other epic) also, but in this work he employed assistants.

The *Iliad* delighted the world, but it cost Pope Addison's friendship in a foolish quarrel about the translation of the first book by a friend of the latter, Thomas Tickell (1686-1740). Quarrelling, however, was natural to Pope, and gave him even more opportunity for poetry than did his friendship. He took his revenge on Addison, as we saw in our last chapter, but the famous character of Atticus was not published till after Addison's death. By then Pope was the acknowledged chief of English literature, and entertained at his Twickenham villa most of the leading men of the day. John Gay (1685-1732), a writer of delightful light verse, and author of the famous *Beggar's Opera*, was a member of the circle. Prior (1664-1721) was no stranger, and as a poet of trifles and of children had no rival. Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) was another friend introduced by Swift, and might claim in his *Night-Piece on Death* to have done something to keep alive the spirit of romance. Not least was John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), humorist, author, and physician, who, with Pope, Gay, and Swift, formed the "Scriblerus Club," whose object was to ridicule all forms of literary pedantry, dulness, and affectation. Pope's friends also included statesmen, soldiers, and men and women of fashion.

His tie with Swift never weakened. He had not taken up the cause of the Tories with the same eagerness (indeed, he declared himself to belong to neither political party), and so their downfall left him untouched. The pair exchanged frequent letters, and,

whenever the Dean came to visit England from his exile in Ireland, their meetings were frequent. Pope also showed the keenest admiration for his friend's great masterpieces produced during these latter years, and the most encouraging interest in their progress. If Swift's hopes of worldly success were ruined, his pen had lost none of its skill, and his mind (as yet) none of its fierce vitality. The amount of his writings is so large that we must only mention one or two of them. In 1724 an attempt by the English Government to interfere with the Irish coinage caused him to produce the *Drapier's Letters*, perhaps the finest of his innumerable political essays. He became the idol of the Irish people, and his championship of them is further shown by his famous piece of irony, the *Modest Proposal*, in which he suggests that their poverty should be aided by making butcher's meat of their superfluous children—rather a grim joke, and one which made Thackeray allude to him as an ogre. These years of exile also saw him at work on much of his best satirical verse. Their triumph, however, lies in his *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), with its wonderful way of making us believe in the impossible, its play of fancy and endless inventiveness, and its ridicule of the political life of the day. Of his latter years there is little reason to speak. Lonely, disappointed, and bitter, he passed under the shadow of madness, and so to the grave.

As a writer Swift has probably been overrated. His style, indeed, is full of force, is pointed and free from affectation, but it lacks beauty. There is no single passage from all his works which you would read over and over again for the music of its sentences or the exquisite choice of its words, as you would do with passages of Browne, or Dryden, or Addison. He

represents the plain and straightforward manner at its perfection, but we must always remember that it is the business of prose, as well as of poetry, to be something more than plain and straightforward—that is, to be melodious and graceful as well, though poetry and prose have different rules of grace and melody. In substance, too, his work fails to satisfy our higher instincts and needs. Critics speak of his coarseness, but nobler writers have been coarser than he. His real failing is want of humanity, of simple love for, and interest in, men and women. His head is always stronger than his heart, and it is from the heart that the great work of the world is done. Moreover, his mind was wanting in poetry, as is shown by his verse—hard, dry, and clear. A writer who fails in these two qualities may appeal to critics of a sort. To the world at large he is unlikely to remain a reality, and Swift to-day is more talked of than read. In the history of English prose he is a Leader because, as we have just said, he represents the perfection of one of its manners. But he has not brought to life a family as other great writers have done. He has been imitated, but never successfully. To do so would mean the possession of a similar mind, and minds of his type are fortunately rare. The pathos of Swift's life lies in the fact that—as we see by *The Journal to Stella*—his character had great possibilities of tenderness and beauty. Events soured him, however, and he had not the strength which wins a reward from sorrow and disappointment.

And now we may go back to Pope, and say something of the work of his later years. If friendship influenced him deeply, personal spite, jealousy, and desire for revenge influenced him even more. With

all his qualities he is not altogether delightful. He could love, but his love once slighted turned to the bitterest hatred. His attack on Addison is one example of this, but a much more striking one is to be found in his behaviour to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), who was probably the finest of English lady-letter-writers before Fanny Burney. Pope had been "taken up" by the great lady, and, it would seem, had attempted to make the friendship a sentimental one. At all events, a coolness arose between them, and henceforth the poet never let slip an opportunity of attacking in the vilest manner his former patroness. A score of other well-known men and women also came under his lash, though with none of them had he such good reason for silence as with Lady Mary. These outbursts are mostly contained in the *Satires*, *Epistles*, and *Imitations from Horace*, which all show Pope at his very best as a writer of verse, as a critic of life, and (when he is addressing his friends) a master of splendid compliment. His literary quarrels were innumerable, and he very often conducted them with great dishonesty. No class of writer more roused his anger than the poorer professional authors—the Grub Street hacks—and his dislike of them prompted the work which is perhaps most truly characteristic of him. *The Dunciad* (1728-29) is a mock epic directed in the first place against Colley Cibber, actor and playwright, and Theobald, critic and editor of Shakespeare, but containing side-strokes at nearly all Pope's literary foes. It is coarse, it is inspired wholly by the desire to give pain, it is reckless of truth and of good feeling, but for all that it is a masterpiece. Its force and swing are magnificent, its easy mastery of language and of verse are a miracle, and it is simply astounding in

its use of previous literature. Now it is a scene of Virgil's that Pope is adapting with matchless skill to his base purpose, now a line or two of Milton or some other poet of the past. However much the poem condemns him as a man, it is the supreme proof of him as artist.

There has been a great deal of argument about Pope's position as a poet, and some have altogether denied him the name. If poetry means an uplifting of our minds to noble and beautiful things, and an increase of our knowledge of things wise and strange—and this the best poetry does mean—these critics are in the right. But it would seem that there exists another sort of poetry whose excellence lies in its skilful use of language and metre, and its power of giving us a picture of the life of a particular age. If such a poetry there be, Pope was one of its very greatest masters.

One thing, at any rate, is certain, and that is that, following in Dryden's footsteps, he gave a very lasting direction to English poetry. In our next chapter or two we shall see that the older, freer, and more romantic spirit of poetry did not wholly die out in the first half of the eighteenth century; but Pope set a very strong fashion, and his influence was, perhaps, more powerful than that of any poet between Dryden and Wordsworth. His character has been quarrelled over quite as much as his work, and undoubtedly it is full of contradictions. Much may be forgiven to a man so afflicted in an age which dared to jeer at affliction; much, too, may be forgiven to one who proved himself a loving and grateful son, and, in many instances, a faithful friend.

CHAPTER XIII

DR. JOHNSON AND HIS AGE

OF the great writers who made famous the eighteenth century after the death of Pope in 1744, none is more important, more impressive, and more interesting than Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). We may safely say that we know more of him as a man than we do of any other English author, and that the best way to understand the period during which he lived is to try to realise its spirit, its aims, and its performances, in relation to him. By sketching his character, by explaining his literary sympathies and antipathies, and by describing some of his chief friends, we should get a fairly clear idea of English literature at one of its richest times of harvest.

We know so much of Johnson, not only because we have his works, but because his life was written by the most loving of his friends and most faithful of his admirers, James Boswell (1740-1795), and remains the greatest masterpiece of English biography. In his way, and in spite of a good many defects and follies, Boswell was a genius, and devoted to his great work all the infinite pains which genius always gives to its undertakings. He studied Johnson from every point of view with the most tender sympathy and the most careful attention. He soaked himself in Johnson, as

it were. And the result is that his portrait of him is absolutely life-like in its every detail. Two clever women, also—Fanny Burney (1752-1840) and Mrs. Thrale (1741-1821)—have left us their personal memories of him. Moreover, there is a vast amount of scattered information on the subject in diaries, letters, memoirs, etc., of the time. For the great Doctor was one who always made an impression of some kind upon those who met him. He was not a man it was possible to overlook or to neglect.

From all these sources we get the idea of a person whose most remarkable feature was passive strength and active force of character. Johnson had a great brain and a great gift for literature; but many less famous men have been as well endowed. What first impresses and then attracts us in him is the sense he gives us of being a man of tough grain, as it were, of having the fine English quality of endurance, the same sort of pluck shown by our soldiers at Waterloo when, for hour after hour, they held their ground in the face of the French charges and artillery fire. That is the passive strength of his character. When we speak of its active force we mean that vigour which enabled him not only to endure years of struggle and neglect, but to gain by the experience, and which rings out so clear and manly in many of his utterances. But with all this strength and force Johnson was not a hard man. He had known direst poverty—whatever he had in later life of success or comfort he owed to himself—but strife and trial and triumph never dulled the glow of his naturally tender heart. He could be very rude, he could be almost brutal, but these failings lay on the surface. Only a very little way below was the John-

son who prayed with simple piety by the bed of a dying servant, who would pause to slip pennies into the hands of sleeping ragamuffins, and who bore the death of his wife as a wound no lapse of years could heal. These human sympathies of his were wonderfully wide. There was hardly a class of society in his day of which he had not seen something, and in no class did prejudice or pride ever prevent his paying tribute to true excellence. With his English strength and force went a very English independence. He would rebuke the pride of a peer, or knock down a publisher, or indulge in a "slanging match" with a bargeman, with splendid impartiality.

He was a born fighter, and perhaps some of his roughness of manner was due to his belief that men who could not suffer hard knocks as well as give them were of no very high value. But he never fought with bitterness; his sword had not been dipped in that poison, at any rate. If we compare him with Swift, we shall see directly the difference between a man soured by experience of life and a man brought by it to a very fine temper.

Like Shakespeare, Johnson had a genius for friendship. No man ever had more friends—more varied, more distinguished, more devoted. He had some form of relationship with almost every great Englishman of his time—with authors, artists, statesmen, lawyers, men of learning, and men of the world. Fox, Burke, Reynolds, Gibbon, Goldsmith—these names flash into the mind at once, and there were literally scores of others, men and women of every rank and condition, from the ruined and destitute up to the richest and noblest in the land.

So we must think of Johnson first as a human being—as a man—and then afterwards as a writer; for, great writer though he was, he showed less of his true greatness in any, or all, of his books than he did in his talk and his life. Perhaps the most remarkable quality about his writings is their sound and unfailing common sense. In every line of his this is apparent, but it is plainest of all, perhaps, in the series of essays known as *The Rambler*. These papers were, to some extent, modelled upon *The Spectator*, but they have none of the airy grace and lightness of Addison and Steele. They show a well-balanced mind, trained alike by learning and experience, treating of the more serious questions of life and of conduct, and expressing itself in a style much more weighty and elaborate than that of the Queen Anne men. In the development of English prose Johnson played an important part. Excellent as the prose of the former age had been, with its absence of mannerisms and easy air of worldly good breeding, we must admit that in less talented hands than those of Swift, Steele, and Addison, it showed a tendency to become insipid and undistinguished, to become so close to ordinary conversation as entirely to lose the literary flavour. Johnson gave back to it the dignity and elaboration it needed, by employing a language less akin to everyday talk, by lengthening his sentences, complicating his constructions, and aiming at a fuller music of rhythm. In *The Rambler* we may justly say that his search for stateliness led him to a certain pomposity, but in later life, when he wrote his famous *Lives of the Poets*, he had learned to control this tendency, and wrote a style of wonderful point and dignity. We shall see a little later how

ably his efforts were recorded by two of his friends, Gibbon and Burke.

The sound common sense which is such a mark of the Doctor's prose distinguished his poetry also. In our modern sense of the word we may doubt if Johnson was a poet at all. For the beauty, terror, and pathos of Nature he had no eye; the strange, far off, and wonderful did not appeal to him; his dislike of history and contempt of foreigners cut him off from the great events of the past and of other countries. For all that, his two chief poems, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, are impressive. They strike us at once as the work of a man who had a great experience of life, and a great intelligence which rendered this experience valuable to him. Moreover, they are splendidly clear and vigorous in expression, full of lines to remember and quote for their terseness and truth.

But we shall come nearest to Johnson as a writer, and understand best how he stood in relation to his age, if we consider him as a critic, for a man's choice of books will tell us almost as much about him as his choice of friends. And directly we make any wide acquaintance with his chief critical work, *The Lives of the Poets*, of which we spoke just now, we begin to realise Johnson's tastes, his loves, his hatreds, and his general views upon literature. We may sum him up in a word or two by describing him as a stubborn champion of the "correct" and "classical" school. The poetry he most admired was of the sort produced by Dryden and by Pope—clear, forceful, and concerned with ordinary human life. With romance he had no sympathy at all; of imagination he had practically

none. Throughout the eighteenth century the voice of Romance was never really silent. We hear it faintly in some of the poems of Thomas Parnell (1679-1718); more clearly in the *Grongar Hill* of John Dyer (1700-1758); very clearly indeed in the descriptive *Seasons* by James Thomson (1700-1748), with their observant pictures of the country, and their use of blank verse instead of the fashionable "couplets," and in his *Castle of Indolence* in Spenserian. Later, Thomas Gray (1716-1771) and William Collins (1721-1759) showed not only the "romantic" love of Nature in all her moods, but also the "romantic" tendency to go to the past, the strange, and the wonderful for their choice of subjects. In 1765 Thomas Percy (1729-1811) published his *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, a collection of ballads and songs which did much to revive interest in our older literature; while the forgeries of Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) and of James Macpherson (c. 1736-1796), who both claimed to have had access to lost treasure-houses of ancient minstrelsy, pointed in the same direction, and exercised a profound influence. But to this music Johnson's ears were deaf. He despised "romantic" poetry in his own day as an affectation, and in the past confused it with barbarism. He saw little in Milton, nothing in Donne, and, as a poet pure and simple, preferred Congreve to Shakespeare, though of Shakespeare as a dramatist and student of human nature he wrote with admirable wisdom. Excellently as he represents the level-headedness of the mid-eighteenth century, its distrust of extremes, and its keen interest in normal life, he stands apart from those elements in it which were to be most fruitful for the literature of the future.

We have spoken of Johnson's services to English prose, and we must now leave him to see how his good work was carried on and reinforced by two writers whom we have already mentioned—Edmund Burke (1729-1797) and Edward Gibbon (1737-1794). Both were friends of their great contemporary (though Gibbon only in rather a distant fashion); both did much for the renewed dignity of English prose style; but here resemblance between them ceases. Burke's intellect was not only a huge and comprehensive one, capable alike of vast and of accurate thinking; it was enlivened and warmed by a spirit of the highest and richest humanity, and dignified and strengthened by a noble and unselfish love of righteousness. No mind at once so great, so elevated, and so splendidly cultured had yet been concerned with English politics and with the questions of philosophy and morality of which politics are an expression. Accordingly, Burke's writings (we might almost say every word of his writings) have a peculiar value and interest. By the passion for truth and justice which always inspired him he was able to raise oratory to a higher level than it had yet attained, or has attained since his day. No speech of his ever seems the work of a mere debater or party politician. His spirit moved above the pettinesses of intrigue and political tactics; his eloquence called men to thoughts nobler and more spacious than those of party success and failure. Even in us readers of to-day he is able to kindle a wonderful glow of sympathy for causes which have long since passed away. As a master of prose he is far ahead of any other English writer of his age. He has all the fulness and dignity of Johnson without a suspicion of

Johnson's pomposity, and he is far more varied and less inclined to imitate the rhythm of Latin and its constructions. His music is magnificent. Some of his greatest passages give us almost the same impression as Milton's grandly moving blank verse, and he can make his prose ring with scorn, or throb with pathos. But, splendid as is his use of the language, it is his force of intellect and his nobility of character which appeal to us most strongly.

Gibbon's was a very much colder and less enthusiastic temperament, and his great work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, has no power of stirring our emotions. None the less, it is, in its way, a very great landmark in our literature. Hitherto nobody had written history with so much reverence for truth, with such vast and patient learning, or with such an ability to handle an enormous subject. Gibbon was a great artist in arraying his material so as to produce the greatest effect, and his huge theme so fascinated him that he never lost sight of it as a single whole. Though he lacks the fire and passion of Burke, his style is never dull, and is admirably fitted to the great matters of which he wrote. A modern critic has termed his book "a prose epic," and it has some of the qualities of epic poetry, its treatment of a mighty subject, for instance, and its stateliness. In the hands of Johnson, Burke, and Gibbon, English prose, as reformed by Dryden and his school, reached its highest point. We shall see later how the great writers of the nineteenth century contributed to its development.

If Burke and Gibbon were the greatest of Johnson's friends, certainly Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) was the most delightful. Though not really of Irish blood,

he had all the true qualities of the Irishman and all his contradictions of character. He was idle and thriftless, yet he managed to get through a very great deal of hard work, and had always something for a needy friend. He loved pleasure—" 'the cards,' and the bowl and tavern-talk"—but his sympathy for the sick and sorry was as tender and active as that of a woman. In his every need, and in almost his every word, we divine a wonderful simplicity and gentleness. You might laugh at Goldsmith, his follies, eccentricities, and touch of Irish vanity, but you must love him too. We feel this in his writings, whether we think of his charming novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, of his essays, with their kindly wit and beautiful sketches of character, his poems, or his plays, which, with those of Sheridan (1751-1816), gave to the later eighteenth century a drama almost as witty as that of the Restoration, and a great deal more wholesome. What wonder that his death cast a gloom over all his friends, that Sir Joshua Reynolds could not paint on that day, and that "the Doctor," who had laughed at, and with, poor Oliver so often, gave his grief expression in a glorious epitaph? He "touched nothing that he did not adorn," Johnson wrote, and the words are true.

Quite outside the busy world of London, which Johnson loved so well, lived one man of letters whom we must not forget among our Leaders. William Cowper (1731-1800) passed most of his days under the shadows of a melancholy passing at times into positive madness, and most of his poems were written as distractions from his unhappiness. The countryside, the pleasures of friendship, the small events of a very simple life, are the main stuff of his work.

But we must not think of him as a sentimental or "namby-pamby" writer. For his age he was a man of advanced and liberal opinions, and in his sane intervals he had real strength of intellect, as well as a delicious sense of humour. His love of Nature for her own sake was sincere, and his observation of her more accurate and close than that of any eighteenth-century poet, except Thomson.

He tried many forms of verse—*The Tirocinium*, an attack upon the public schools; *The Task*, a rambling essay in blank verse; hymns, lyrics, and occasional pieces. Besides this, he translated Homer, and was, perhaps, the best letter-writer in a period of good letter-writing. He keeps many of the mannerisms of the "classical" school, but his mind was much in sympathy with the romantic view of life and letters. He is one of the stepping-stones between the old world and the new, and by no means the least important. All that he wrote is marked by an exquisite refinement and delicacy of mind and feeling that are hardly characteristic of the robust, vigorous, but coarse age in which he lived.

CHAPTER XIV

RICHARDSON, FIELDING, SMOLLETT, AND STERNE

It is always difficult to get a clear idea of our own country at any distant period of history, and unless we are careful to take a very wide view, and to consult all possible sources of information, we are likely to get a very false notion. For example, if we judged England in the later eighteenth century only from the writers of whom we spoke in the last chapter, we should think of her as a land passing through a sort of golden age of sound common sense, of high moral feeling, and eager intellectual life. We should think of her, too, as a land not only happy in those present good things, but full of promise for the future. To some extent this would be true enough, but there is another and a darker side to the picture. The England which revered Dr. Johnson and listened to Burke, was also the England of which we get glimpses in the pages of frank letter-writers, keepers of diaries, and compilers of memoirs. Ignorance of the darkest kind brooded over the great majority of the nation; only a small number of people, compared to the whole population, could read and write, and along with ignorance went disease and vice and crime. The condition of the humbler classes was deplorable in its poverty and squalor, and the opportunities open to the poor for

bettering themselves were very limited. Highway robbery, murder, and other grave offences were exceedingly common, and though the law was then much sterner than it is now, and the penalty of death could be inflicted (and often was) for trifling thefts, this sternness seemed to make things worse instead of better. The prison system tended by its brutality to make criminals instead of reforming them. Drunkenness was so common as hardly to be considered a vice at all. For the time being the Church of England had fallen into a torpid condition, and had but very little influence over the lives of the people. Living Christianity existed mostly only among confessed Dissenters, or among such men as the Wesleys and Whitefield, whom the coldness and stupidity of the Church tended to drive into dissent.

Nor was the darker side of the picture filled only by the figures of the poor and the humble. Under the arts and graces of fashionable life lurked a very great deal that was ugly and sordid. Cleanliness, as we understand it to-day, was rare. Both gentlemen and ladies ate meals of really amazing grossness, and the former thought it no disgrace to drink their three or four bottles of wine at dinner, and be carried to bed by their servants. Female education was still in a very poor state, and the idea of a woman choosing her own husband and ordering her own life was generally considered ridiculous. Young people were mercilessly beaten by their parents and teachers, and were not uncommonly allowed to see sights of the most dreadful brutality and violence, while their minds remained wholly uncultivated. Our public schools, to some extent, and our Universities almost wholly,

were as lazy, dull, and inefficient as the Church. A general coarseness pervaded society. Few fashionable persons (if any) seem to have thought it revolting that a man of the world, such as the famous George Selwyn, should delight in attending executions, and should coolly note the behaviour of victims, sometimes mere children in years.

All this was, of course, only a survival from the past. New ideas were stirring, new and wider notions of morality and of reform. Gradually hope was becoming more possible for the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. Among the wealthier classes individuals were beginning to revolt against the existing state of things, and to ask whether it was by necessity that men were dissipated and women foolish. Still, we must never forget these shadows across "the good old days." If we want to know exactly how wide and how dark they lay, we must dip into the letters and journals of the time, or study the wonderful pictures of Hogarth, or make ourselves acquainted with the works of the great writers whose names head this chapter.

For some little time we have not spoken of the novel, and, indeed, so far the novel has not made much of a figure among our landmarks at all. We saw its beginning in the days of Elizabeth, when Lyly wrote his *Euphues*; we have spoken of Bunyan and the grand work done by him in his *Pilgrim's Progress*; we have mentioned the tales of Defoe. But really up till now we may doubt whether, with the exception of Bunyan's allegory, there had ever been a real English novel. For to make a true and perfect novel certain things are essential. We must have a story, of course—that is our first need; and then this story must be unfolded

by relating events, and by letting the personages speak for themselves and with each other. In the words usually used by critics, we must have "plot," and "episode" and "dialogue." But even more necessary than any of these, or than any of them except "plot," is the element of "character"; that is to say, the men and women who appear in the course of the story must stand out as real people to the reader. They must not be mere figures to whom certain experiences occur, and who perform certain actions. We must be able to feel with and for them in their joys and sorrows, to understand how they are affected in mind and soul and heart by the various episodes, and to realise that their success or failure comes about as the result of their own characters. It is this element alone which can give true and lasting life to the novel, and it is in this element that the English novel before Richardson was most lacking. Among previous writers Bunyan alone possessed the gift of imparting true life to the people he described.

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) was by trade a printer, and led the quiet life of a respectable middle-class citizen. He was a fairly prosperous, not very interesting, person, with a taste for the society of adoring females, and rather a "pussy-cat" temperament. He already was fifty when he began to write a small volume of model letters for the use of unready writers, and, opening with one from a virtuous servant-maid describing the difficulties of her position, strayed on, as it were, into the composition of *Pamela* (1740). The book is full of faults and absurdities. Pamela, the servant-maid in question, is rather artful in her propriety, and the general air of sentimentality is dis-

tinctly tiresome. Moreover, of certain sides of life Richardson was quite ignorant. For all that, he had made a great discovery, and had qualities which enabled him to make excellent (though not the best) use of it. He had found out that ordinary life, without the slightest mixture of the strange and the adventurous, could be rendered interesting if one took pains to understand and faithfully describe the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people. He was fortunate in a natural gift for such understanding, and in having hit on a method (that of letters) which made such description natural and easy. *Pamela* was a great and immediate success, and in 1741 Richardson followed it up with a sequel—a very inferior piece of work. In 1748 appeared the eight volumes of *Clarissa Harlowe*, which had all the good qualities of its predecessor in a much higher degree, the faithful observation and description of detail, the excellent use of the correspondence method, and the piercing insight into the human heart. Like *Pamela*, too, *Clarissa Harlowe* irritates by its author's passion for sentiment and his occasional display of ignorance. Perhaps irritation is the leading experience of those who try to read Richardson's last (and longest) novel, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). Sir Charles was intended as the author's portrait of a truly good man, and has most of the trying and wearisome attributes of the "model person." His perfection is so perfect that long before we have done with him we find ourselves maliciously wishing he would break through it for the sake of variety.

In *Pamela* and in *Clarissa Harlowe* Richardson had not only done great works in themselves, he had also opened the road of other workers. As it left his hands,

the novel was at last complete in all its limbs, and could in future adapt itself to any changes of circumstance. The old printer is truly and in the best sense its "father." No novel since his day has failed to owe something to him, and all later novelists are in some way or another his "sons." His greatest discovery lay, of course, in his treatment of ordinary character; but his skilful use of detail and his way of telling his story by letters have had great influence as well. From every point of view he is a vastly important figure in our literature. We must remember, too, that he is the first English writer to win a great success and to have a wide influence outside his own country. In France his novels were devoured, and were praised by some of the greatest and best men of the age.

One of the earliest of his followers was not a very reverent or respectful disciple. Henry Fielding (1707-1754) was a young man of good family and poor means, who had been driven to earn a living by literature. Manly, robust, widely acquainted with men and women, and by no means over-refined or sensitive, he was struck by just those points in *Pamela* which laid it most open to ridicule. Accordingly he determined to parody it, and his *Joseph Andrews* (1742) begins as a burlesque story of the trials and temptations of Pamela's brother. But just as Richardson roamed off from his original intention of producing a "Ready Letter-Writer," so Fielding, under the sway of his own genius, deserted his plan of poking fun at Richardson. The chief character of the book, Parson Adams, possessed himself of his creator's imagination, and the result is an independent and very admirable (if not wholly admirable) piece of fiction. The book

gives us most of Fielding's best qualities—his humanity, his humour, his profound knowledge of life. It is in no way the equal, however, of the novel which he gave to the world some seven years later. From every standpoint *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), is a great masterpiece. It is a masterpiece as a story, for Tom's adventures are splendidly narrated, and the whole book is wonderfully balanced and constructed. It is a masterpiece as a picture of its times and their life; but most of all is it a masterpiece as a study of human character. Hardly one of the many men and women who fill its page is otherwise than life-like. In Squire Western, the type of the coarse and brutal country gentleman of his day, and in Partridge, we have portraits of the most exquisite truth and humour, and Squire Western and Partridge are only two out of a great number. *Amelia*, which appeared in 1751, is less excellently constructed than *Tom Jones*, but is only a very little way behind it in the nobler qualities of fiction.

Fielding is great in very much the same sort of way as Shakespeare, only we must remember that Shakespeare added to his other greatnesses greatness as a poet, while Fielding was no poet at all. In other respects the men are much alike. Each had a wide view of life, and a free as well as a wide one—that is, neither allowed his study of life to be restricted or hampered by conventions or prejudices; each was convinced that life was a greater thing than any theory, and that no theory was of the least value which clashed with the facts. Hence we can say of both that they are universal; they have taken the world for their parish. Again, Shakespeare and Fielding meet in

their humour. The mind that gave us Falstaff was very closely akin to the mind that gave us Squire Western. We may also compare them in power of irony, in ability greatly to handle great subjects so as to produce one single effect, and lastly, in that essential soundness of heart and head which marked them as great men as well as great writers.

Fielding, then, is a leader, but he is a leader of the lonely kind. He did not invent any form of literature (we shall generally find that our most important leaders did not), and his treatment of the novel was so much the result of his character that it has never been easy for anyone to tread in his footsteps. If he has any "son" at all, that "son" is Thackeray, who displays many of the same qualities, and who looked back to his predecessor with particular reverence.

From Fielding we can get some idea of the squalid and ugly side of eighteenth-century life in England. We can, however, get a much clearer one from Tobias Smollett (1721-1771), a Scotchman, who had a varied experience of the world, and has given us a good deal of it in his novels. Smollett was not a man of much imagination; he was unskilful in the weaving of regular plots, and none of his books has very much story. They describe the roaming adventures of their heroes (all rather odious people), and are full of pictures of contemporary life and rather exaggerated sketches of peculiar characters. Of all the novelists of the time, Smollett comes closest to Hogarth in the impression he makes on us. The world of his novels is even more repulsive than that of Hogarth's pictures, for he had a way of dwelling upon the evil in things and of over-

looking the good, which was not really a characteristic of the great painter. Indifferent fortune, hard work, and a personal experience of "the seamy side" all tended to embitter him and to make him caricature life rather bitterly. This is especially true of his earlier novels, *Roderick Random* (1748), for instance, or *Peregrine Pickle* (1751). His latest, *Humphrey Clinker* (1770), shows a much kindlier view of human nature. His descriptions are often admirable, especially those of seafaring life, of which he had seen something in his youth. Some of his characters, too, come very near to reality, but the caricaturist in him always tended to conquer the painter of portraits, and in the same way his best comic writing always inclines to become farcical and therefore unreal. His roving and adventurous stories started a fashion which has never wholly died out, and of which more than one of Dickens's novels is an example; indeed, Smollett exercised more influence on later writers than any novelist of his time, except Richardson, and is therefore a leader to be remembered. His manner was easy to imitate, and involved little artistic skill. With the exception of Dickens, his "sons" have been of the second or even third and fourth classes of merit.

We could not speak of the novelists of this century without mentioning Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), though his work has found few imitators or followers, and no successful ones. Like Fielding, he was too much himself to found a school or start a fashion; but in every respect, except that of style, he is infinitely Fielding's inferior. He has wit, great literary knowledge, a certain sense of character, and a wonderful sensibility to the pathetic and whimsical; but he saw

life neither steadily nor whole, he was not interested in it as a serious business, and he played with his emotions till they lost all sincerity. Probably he would never have set out to write a real novel; had he done so, he would almost certainly have failed, for he completely lacked the power of construction and the high seriousness of the great novelist. His *Tristram Shandy* (1760) is an amazing medley of queer knowledge, rather cumbersome fooling, and natural meanness of spirit, with some real wit and some exquisite cameos of character. With its hero it is hardly concerned, and its digressions are innumerable. Probably most honest readers find it dull, but few have the courage to say so. From its pages might be collected many passages of delightful writing and a mass of the poorest and flattest attempts at humour. His *Sentimental Journey* (1768) is a good deal less heavy, and, like its predecessor, is full of good things; but no man ever understood less than Sterne how to make a book, and few men have ever possessed less noble qualities of soul. His work had a great popularity in France, and has been much read and talked of in this country. Thackeray admired the writer and despised the man, and probably this is a reasonable attitude, if we are careful to remember the fact that the vast mass of the writing is redeemed only by occasional patches of the greatest brilliance and even beauty.

From the hands of these four novelists the novel came complete and tried at every point. Seeing how great is its influence to-day, we must look back to the years of its making as a very important period.

CHAPTER XV

WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

THE two great poets whose names stand at the head of this chapter, and whose friendship and work form its main subject, were leaders of a new school of English poetry, and of a new way of looking both at literature and at life. This new school and new way is spoken of by critics as the "Romantic Movement," and, before we talk of Wordsworth and Coleridge themselves, we shall do well to try to understand what these words mean.

Romanticism, then, we may describe as a view of life much wider, deeper, and more mystical than the view taken by the plain common sense of the eighteenth century. It trusted a great deal more to the emotions and sentiments of the human heart, and was far less inclined to accept logic and cold reason than was the age of Johnson. It set great value upon the beauty and terror and wonder of Nature, and saw a real kinship between the moods of man's spirit and the changes of natural scenery. It likewise set a great and new value upon man, not on account of his power of civilisation, which had rendered him interesting to the older thinkers, but on account of his ability to feel great and simple emotions and to realise the world of spiritual things. To the Romantics (as the disciples

of Romanticism are called) men are essentially equal because of this ability, and are good or bad as they make use of or neglect it. Hence the humble and unlettered often appeared to them of higher interest than the noble, wealthy, or cultivated, because (rightly or wrongly) the Romantics believed that the humble and unlettered were the more capable of depth and simplicity of feeling. Again, Romanticism looked at the history of the race from a new standpoint, believing that every age had had its peculiar spirit and had done some definite work for progress. Lastly, it was profoundly convinced of the reality and importance of spiritual things, and was deeply touched by all past legends and symbols through which men had tried to express their experience of them.

So in the Romantic Movement we can grasp five main threads: (1) An appeal from the head to the heart; (2) a return to Nature as a friend and teacher; (3) a sense of the value and equality of all human creatures; (4) a new interest in and understanding of the past; (5) a reverence for the mystical, spiritual, and religious.

These ideas and interests were not confined to England. In Germany they were diffused among a group of brilliant and profound thinkers, poets, and critics. In France they had no small share in causing that huge national convulsion which is known as the French Revolution, and which had so great an influence upon nearly all the English Romantics. In England the new spirit had two main effects upon literature: (1) It gave writers a vast amount of new subject-matter; (2) it caused them to express this new subject-matter in a new way—to break with the

“classical” and “correct” tradition of Pope and his school.

When we were talking of Dr. Johnson and his age, we saw that throughout the eighteenth century Romanicism was stirring, though at times very feebly; that certain poets had been influenced by the beauty of Nature, and that others had felt the charm and interest of the past. We may say that the new age really dawned when Wordsworth and Coleridge published their famous *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798; but before this date two poets (each a Leader in his way) had sounded the Romantic note with remarkable clearness and force. We must pause to pay them a little attention.

William Blake (1757-1827) was by profession an engraver, by nature a mystic and seer, and by divine inspiration a poet. As he saw visions from his early childhood and showed a lifelong inability to deal with the practical, we may pardon those persons who would convict him of insanity; he was, at least, remarkably eccentric, and his poetry bears many traces of his eccentricity. It is often incoherent, not seldom ungrammatical, sometimes hopelessly obscure; but, at its best, it is pure gold. At its best it has a simplicity, a truth, and a singing note which had been attained by no English poet since the early seventeenth century. Blake loved children and child-life, freedom from cant and convention, and all good and beautiful things; moreover, he was a strong believer in the spiritual. Trifles appeared to him as symbols of vast and half-understood truths. His *Poetical Sketches* (1783), *Songs of Innocence* (1789), and *Songs of Experience* (1794), are full of little poems as lyrical as those of the greatest

Elizabethans, yet charged with a peculiar simplicity and piercingness that are all his own. "The divine silliness of Blake," it has been called, but the silliness is much less certain than the divinity. His age did not appreciate him (how should it ?), but he lived happy and died content, and his work is a joy for ever to anyone who cares for poetic beauty and truth. Not only in his way of writing is he a Romantic, but in his way of thought also, his love of the real, and his hatred of cramping rule and pharisaical law.

Robert Burns (1759-1796) was a man of much greater strength and fiercer passion than Blake, but he had all Blake's love of freedom, more than Blake's gift of song, and (what Blake never possessed) a vigorous sense of humour. An Ayrshire peasant, he had but little education, and remained a rustic to the end of a life full of love-affairs, carousals, and hard work. His best lyrics were composed as he followed the plough, and in his native dialect, and are strong with the natural force, feeling, and independence of a stalwart stock in close contact with mother earth. In Scotland the song had never died out of literature, as for over a hundred years it died in England, and we find Burns over and over again inspired by the lines or the lilt of some not very distant forerunner. At his happiest he gives us the very purest and most natural lyrical music since Shakespeare, an outpouring of his simple, manly, and passionate heart, as spontaneous as the calling of spring thrush or blackbird. In his *Cotter's Saturday Night* he draws a perfect picture of the beauty of simple charities and lowly, yet noble, affections, and in such poems as *Tam O'Shanter* (his own favourite) we see his excellent sense of comedy and character.

He was far removed from the philosophical and historical ideas of the Romantics, and he has no breath of spirituality; but he is their predecessor in his naturalness of language, his singing power, his sturdy sense of equality, and the free rein he gave to the expression of emotion and passion. The appearance of his poems (his first volume was published in 1786) won him applause, and made him something of a "society lion," a success that hardly benefited his character; but he preserved his vigorous independence to the end.

And now we may pass on to Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the story of their famous friendship. In the long life of the former (1770-1850) experience and the great poetry born of experience were crowded into a wonderfully few years. The supreme events of his life began with a journey to France, after he had completed his education at Cambridge, in 1791, when he became an enthusiastic disciple of the French Revolution as interpreted by the Girondins or moderate revolutionaries. His guardians probably saved him from the scaffold by compelling him to return to this country in 1792, and from England he watched the progress of the great drama. He saw his friends swept from power; he saw passion and revenge and hatred carrying all before them; he saw England taking up arms against the cause he believed to be the cause of liberty and justice. What wonder if his noble and idealistic spirit passed under a cloud of oppressive doubt and dread, which, for the time being, shattered alike his faith in God and his faith in man? His time of trial was bitter, but, happily, was also comparatively brief, for in 1795 a small legacy gave him the opportunity of making a home with his sister Dorothy,

at Racedown in Dorsetshire. Dorothy Wordsworth must have been a remarkable woman. She had the keenest love and acutest observation of Nature, a gentle and noble character, and a complete understanding of her brother's rather difficult temperament. Under her influence and the winning charm of the Dorsetshire scenery he began to recover his peace of mind, and find answers to the problems which had been vexing him. As he looked into the life of natural things, he not only recovered his boyish passion for them, he also realised in their progress and growth a patient orderliness and "wise passivity," very different from the fierce and feverish haste and activity of social and political life. The visible world became something more than a consoling companion; it became a teacher, too, and he could write—

" One impulse from the vernal wood
Can teach us more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."

He began to appeal from cold reason to emotion, and to gain sympathy with and insight into the simplicity, dignity, and strength of rustic life. In the autumn of 1795 his cure was further aided by his meeting with Coleridge, who was a neighbour, and so well did friendship between them prosper that in 1797 Wordsworth moved to Alfoxden to be nearer to Nether Stowey, Coleridge's home at the time.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is one of the most pathetic figures in our literature, by reason of his splendid genius and the very sad confusion and waste of his middle and later years. He had been educated at Christ's Hospital and at Cambridge, and had already

acquired a vast and various stock of knowledge, which went on widening and deepening throughout his life. In literary culture he far surpassed Wordsworth, but the two young men found a host of common interests and ideas. They shared a passion for Nature, an enthusiasm for extreme liberalism in politics, a taste for the mystical and philosophical, and a spirit of revolt against the typical literary style of the eighteenth century. Coleridge was nothing if not a stimulating companion. To much that was vague and unformed in Wordsworth's mind he could help to give shape; his metaphysical ability enabled him to aid his friend in ordering and making clear to himself the new thoughts that were surging within him. He had, too, a certain dreamy tenderness, which went to soften and humanise Wordsworth's naturally rugged northern character, and to give him a wider and finer insight into men. Wordsworth, on his side, could give Coleridge the strength he needed, the sureness of Nature's joyous message, and the aspiration after complete expression of himself.

The first fruits of their intercourse was the volume of poems called *Lyrical Ballads*, which appeared in 1798. Coleridge himself has left us an account of its aim and intention as "a series of poems . . . of two sorts: the one of common subjects 'such as will be found in every village,' poetically treated; the other. of subjects mainly 'supernatural,' but made real by the dramatical truth of such emotions, supposing them real." In simpler language, one class of poems was to spiritualise and to render romantic the ordinary and familiar; the other was to make familiar and credible the romantic and spiritual. The former was

the business of Wordsworth; the latter of Coleridge. The one poet attempted his task with almost perfect success in *We Are Seven*, with some measure of success in *The Thorn* and *Simon Lee*, and without any success at all in such poems as *The Idiot Boy*; the other attained perfectly his aim in *The Ancient Mariner*. The whole collection shows the revolt of the Romantics alike from the style and the choice of subject of the eighteenth century. The "couplet" is not employed once; mostly the metrical system is of the very simplest; and where blank verse is used, it is of a new type. The language is always of the directest and most lucid kind, very close indeed to that of ordinary talk, and quite free from the turns and figures of the older school. In prefaces to the first and second editions Wordsworth laid down the principles regarding subject, language, and metre which had governed him in composing his share of the whole. Later Coleridge criticised this "manifesto" (as we may call it), but at the time we must suppose that it met with his approval.

From the whole volume two poems stand out as giving us all the most characteristic qualities of the two great masters. Wordsworth's *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* are full of that profound and mystical love of Nature which is the strongest element in his poetry; they show us also his close observation of the visible world. Moreover, in their references to his own spiritual experience and the development of his soul, they are a foretaste of *The Prelude*, his great attempt to write an epical autobiography. Lastly, the passionate outburst of love and gratitude to his sister is an example of his reverence for the ties of natural relationship. Coleridge's

Ancient Mariner is not less charged with his peculiar qualities. A story of ghostly adventure at sea, of a mysterious sin and a mysterious punishment, it is representative of his love of the dreamy and supernatural. It shows, too, almost perfectly his wonderful gift of metre, his sense of colour and visible beauty, and his amazing power to produce the most striking effects by sheer simplicity. An additional interest to the poem lies in the fact that the friends thought at first of composing it together, but found the undertaking impossible, though, as a matter of fact, Wordsworth did contribute a line or two.

The book was not very well received, and it was especially the poem we have last mentioned which angered conservative critics; indeed, upon ears trained to the measures of Pope and his followers the blank verse of Wordsworth and the delicately varied ballad-burden of Coleridge must have fallen strangely enough. One does not imagine that either poet can have expected to carry the world with him at a single stroke. About the time the book appeared the pair set off for a tour in Germany, and not long after his return Wordsworth began his long residence at Grasmere, moving to his final home, Rydal Mount, in 1813. For some time he and Coleridge kept in close touch with each other, Coleridge living for some period at Keswick, and at one time actually in the Grasmere family; but in all likelihood the era of most powerful influence of one mind upon another finished at Nether Stowey. A year or two later Wordsworth had completely "found his feet," and was master of his own mighty genius, and not very long after the dreadful decay of Coleridge's character had begun. The story of his

life becomes, after 1804, a wretched record of weakened will and wavering purpose. From time to time he lectured brilliantly upon literature, he wrote in prose upon philosophy and criticism, his talk was an illumination to a circle of clever admirers; but his great work as a poet ended with his superb *Ode to Dejection* in 1802. Was Coleridge, then, a failure, we may ask? And if to fall far below one's possibilities and to fritter away supreme gifts in opium-dreams and ill-conceived endeavours is to fail, we must answer "Yes." But the failure was a splendid one—more splendid than the successes of most other men. His best odes, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Christabel*, make up a body of poetry, small enough in size, but of absolutely supreme value. Coleridge is the king among all our poets who have taken for their subject the borderland between this world and the worlds beyond, who have explored the region of dreams and of things supernatural. No one else has his magic, his power of compelling us to accept his statements and to thrill with awe and wonder at his suggestions. As a musician in verse, he is the greatest since Milton; he is even greater than Milton in his mysterious ability to stir our imagination by the cadence and lilt of his lines, not so much to make sound go with sense (Milton's gift) as to give sound an independent, indefinable sense of its own. At his best he is all pure-poet, and in a class by himself.

As an influence it would be hard to overrate him. His poetry, with that of Wordsworth, broke down barriers on every side of our literature, and gave to men new subjects and new ways of treating them. After him English poetry could never be quite the

same; it must always have a greater sensitiveness to delicate impressions and to subtle shades of difference; it must always have enormously increased resources of measure and cadence. His criticism, also, and his talk carried the greatest weight. Perhaps, of all our critics, he is the highest; it is, anyhow, certain that he destroyed the old standards of rule and classical authority, and set up new and really permanent methods. He looked at the works of the past as an historian—that is, he tried to understand them in the spirit of the men who wrote them and for whom they were written. He looked at them as a philosopher—that is, he tried to see them as showing universal and everlasting qualities of the human mind. By recalling attention and interest to our older poets, dramatists, and prose writers, he began a movement which bore the richest, fairest, and most numerous fruit of the nineteenth century. More than one of the young men (Carlyle, for instance) who heard him pour out his mind at Highgate in his later years carried away ideas which influenced their life's work. He is so great a figure, in fact, that his shadow lies across all subsequent time, and that his descendants and "sons" can never really die out of the land.

The later years of Wordsworth present us with one point of resemblance to those of Coleridge; in every other way they are different. Before the nineteenth century was very old he, too, had completed the work for which he is most justly famous; he had written the best of his lyrics and sonnets, he had written his finest narrative poems of peasant life, he had written his *Odes To Duty* and on *Intimations of Immortality*, and he had written *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*. As

time passed by inspiration became more and more rare; his later verse is a dull expanse lit up with an occasional flash of the old splendour, till he passes into a "wise silence." But always Wordsworth lived worthily of himself and his best poetry; he knew no failure of will, no loss of courage, no lowering of high ideals. His life is a poem in itself for its nobility and strength of purpose and conquest of good.

His poetry is so large in bulk that we cannot hope to speak of it fully here. We have said something of his love of Nature and the mysticism that made him see Nature as the garment of the divine. We must not think of him, however, as neglecting the outer appearance for the inner reality. No poet ever observed more closely or described more beautifully all the sights which Nature offers to a keen and ready eye—little things like the hovering of a green linnet and the running of a hare between wet furrows; mighty scenes, such as sunset and sunrise over the mountains, and the unearthly light of the storm, and the brooding beauty of forest and lake. Wordsworth, moreover, saw into the hearts of men and women, especially the men and women of his own northern hills and dales. He is a true poet of humanity. His *Michael*, *The Affliction of Poor Margaret*, *Resolution and Independence*, many narratives in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, show a wonderful understanding of the poor, a tender sympathy with their sorrows and joys. Also he is a poet of childhood. To him children appeared as creatures newly come from "God, who is their home." They were sacred in his eyes, and their simple ways and talk seemed to him evidence of a higher wisdom than grown men and women might possess.

When we come to consider the verse and language of his poetry we are also struck into admiration by his greatness. He has not the bewitching music of Coleridge, nor Coleridge's magic of speech; but he has a grand simplicity alike of word and metre very fitting to his intense and noble feeling. In any great poem of his it would be hard to suggest improvement. It is generally, indeed, the fine thought that strikes us first; but as we pass from the thought to its expression we realise how excellent the expression is just because it gives us the thought so clearly. He does not quite live up to his own doctrine of using the words of ordinary people in the usual order, but he is wonderfully free from literary tricks and turns. The secret of his style is sincerity. No line of his was ever written but from the heart.

Wordsworth lived to see neglect and hostile criticism pass into cordial admiration and love, and ever since his death his power over the English people has been increasing, till it is fair to say he stands with Milton and with Shakespeare. He is a poet to whom men and women turn for delight, but he is also one to whom they turn for consolation and betterment. His grave, deep tones have brought sweetness and light to innumerable troubled souls; his gospel of "Nature's healing power" has been gladly heard by thousands. Then, too, he is a poet's poet. Tributes to him have been paid by many a later singer, and many a later singer has learnt from him the beauty of simplicity and the value of close and patient observation. His mark upon our literature is as great as that of Coleridge and as lasting. Perhaps the greatest of his "sons" is Matthew Arnold, who came near at times to the very

notes of the master's voice; but numberless poets have been and still are his pupils. The work that he and Coleridge planned almost as boys in the quiet lanes and meadows of Dorsetshire he carried out as a sacred mission. He and Milton have both something of the priestly air, the manner of men called to a high office in the service of the race.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME LEADERS IN PROSE

WE saw that the English prose of the eighteenth century came to its high-water mark in the writings of Johnson, Gibbon, and Burke. In our present chapter we are going to speak of three writers, each one of whom did something for prose in the earlier half of the nineteenth century by treating it in a way of his own, and with almost as much originality as Coleridge and Wordsworth had shown in their treatment of poetry. Each of these three writers was a friend of the two great Romantic poets, and in the prose of each we can feel the Romantic influence very strongly.

Charles Lamb (1775-1834) was a schoolfellow of Coleridge and a lifelong friend, and in the earlier years of his life Coleridge's influence over him counted for a very great deal. His best years were spent as a business man (he was a clerk in the India House), and his whole existence was clouded by two tragic events. As quite a young man his brain for a time gave way, and he became an inmate of a lunatic asylum, while a little later his beloved sister Mary in a fit of insanity murdered their mother. Mary Lamb recovered her reason, but throughout her life had frequent periods of madness, and was only saved from perpetual confinement by her brother's determination and unselfish

devotion. As little more than a lad he gave up all hope of marriage or of independent life, and set himself to make his sister forget the dreadful past and to provide for her happiness. He complained but little; still, a few passages in his letters and one or two in his essays show how great was his trial and how thorough his self-sacrifice. If Lamb were not among our greatest prose-writers, we should still have to admire and respect him as one of the bravest and best of men. We must beware, however, of thinking of him as a man of melancholy character. He loved life too well for that, and found a real and lasting happiness in the society of old friends and old books. His brilliant intellect and his sweetness of temper ("My gentle-hearted Charles," Coleridge loved to call him) made him hosts of friendships, and brought him into touch with many of the best minds of his day. He knew Wordsworth on intimate terms, and of his affection for his great schoolfellow the few words written at the latter's death are splendid evidence.

Happy the poets who found such a friend to act as their critic! And it is as a critic, perhaps, that Lamb did his most influential, if not actually his best, work. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and their school he perfectly understood and felt with. His review of *The Excursion* is a great tribute to Wordsworth's genius, a greater tribute to Lamb's own critical ability. But his deepest feelings lay with the past, with the poets and playwrights of Elizabeth's reign, and the great prose authors of the seventeenth century. In reviving interest in them his share was a very large one. His *Specimens of the Dramatists* did much to show that Shakespeare had contemporaries almost comparable to himself,

while his notes to the *Selections* show his keen insight and exquisite power of interpretation. The affectionate study of the Elizabethan theatre has had so much influence on English literature since Lamb's day that we cannot be too grateful to him for his encouragement of it. His love of the old prose-writers, however, perhaps influenced him even more profoundly than that of the poets. He is steeped in Burton, Fuller, and Browne to such an extent that we are reminded of them by scores and scores of his phrases and sentences. Their manner had passed into his very blood, so to speak. For the development of prose style this fact was of great importance. It showed how prose style could be rendered interesting (which it is the first business of prose to be), literary, and dignified without persisting in the way of the great eighteenth-century writers. Lamb's methods gave all later prose-writers a much greater opportunity of expressing fine and delicate thoughts, and of displaying with charm the peculiarities of their minds and characters.

Self-expression, indeed—that is the showing of what is one's very own in thought and feeling—was one of the most characteristic objects of the Romantics (the "classical" writers aimed at putting tersely and well ideas which were common to all men). And it is just by his gift of self-expression that Charles Lamb has won so many admirers. We see this directly we turn to his famous *Essays of Elia*. They are frankly and delightfully personal, full of the wicked pronoun "I," and quite free of any of those devices by which the eighteenth-century essayists used to conceal themselves. Their egoism is their principal charm, and what a delightful "ego" Charles Lamb's was! No

man surely ever had so whimsical a mind, so great a power of seeing much in trifles, such sweet tenderness, and again such a gift of innocent and happy laughter. Lamb wrote mostly as a recreation from business, and his essays have nearly all a holiday air about them. Their delightful author carries you off like a fellow-truant, and takes you the most wonderful journey of sightseeing and fun, mostly about London, to its theatres and shows, to its quiet inns of court, old schools, and business-houses. Nearly always he gives you a glimpse of some odd character, kind Sarah Battle who made a religion of whist—and a very strict religion, too—Captain Starkey and his family in their dignified poverty, and many others. Yes, they are great junketings with “gentle-hearted Charles,” and if now and then his mood is a little wistful and “tender-dear,” as they say in Cornwall, his pathos is even better than his merriment.

By this outspoken, personal manner of his Lamb made the essay a quite new thing, and gave it numberless new possibilities. He tried his hand at other forms of literature as well, wrote a novel, some verses, a tragedy which shows his close acquaintance with the great Elizabethans, and a farce so bad that he is said to have joined in hissing it off the stage. He also aided his sister in a delightful volume of *Tales from Shakespeare*. But it is as essayist and critic that he stands out as a Leader and as one of the most winning among English writers.

It is a proof of the sweetness of Lamb's temper that, except for an occasional “coldness,” he contrived to keep friends with William Hazlitt (1778-1830), the next of our Leaders, and perhaps the greatest of

our critics before Matthew Arnold. Hazlitt was the son of a Unitarian minister, and continued throughout his life a fierce apostle of the Radicalism which was then almost a necessary accompaniment of Nonconformity. As a very young man he came under the influence of Coleridge. In one of his finest essays he has told us the story of their first meeting, and of the new worlds thrown open to him by the spell of the poet's talk. Friendship soon ripened between them, and Hazlitt passed into the group of companions whose leaders were Coleridge and Wordsworth. Even so, he developed late, however, and his life may be roughly divided into two periods—one of acquisition and self-education, the other of self-expression. Throughout, it was complicated by his passion for quarrelling, and his weakness for unworthy forms of sentimental experience. Sometimes, indeed, he fought for the sake of an idea or a principle; we must be just to him, and own that he sincerely and unselfishly loved progress, liberty, and truth. Only too often, however, he used the sharp lash of his tongue and pen to satisfy a queer and unamiable desire of inflicting pain.

His critical writings give us the idea of a man with a real passion for the best in literature. The by-ways and blind alleys which attracted the roving steps of Lamb had for him very little charm; he could not rival Coleridge in width and depth of knowledge, and he had little of Coleridge's philosophical ability. But he had a wonderful gift of separating the great from the merely good, and an equally wonderful gift of explaining and communicating his enthusiasm. He had at one time been a portrait-painter by profession, and in his treatment of the books and writers he loved he

has a good deal of the painter's manner. He poses his subject, as it were, so as to display its features to the best advantage, and he is a master of those effects of contrast which remind us of an artist's use of light and shade. Moreover, when he is not the victim of political prejudice, he is remarkably sane and impartial. His *Lectures on the English Poets* are a finely-balanced survey of English poetry from Chaucer up to his own time. No Romantic critic of that day approached Pope, the leader of Classicism, with anything like the fairness shown him by Hazlitt. Excellent, too, are his essays on the novelists of the previous century, on the comedy of the Restoration, and his lectures on Shakespeare and the older dramatists. Of all our critics he is the most convincing, the most easily able to carry us off in the train of his opinion.

But the real essence of Hazlitt, alike the best and the worst of him, lies in the series of studies of his own contemporaries, called *The Spirit of the Age*. These show to perfection his gifts as a painter of word-portraits. Take, for instance, his picture of his old friend and idol, Coleridge. How truly and certainly Hazlitt lays bare the weaknesses, the causes of failure, in that difficult and pathetic character ! It is remorseless, it is cruel—Coleridge must have suffered under it intensely—but it is appallingly true and almost fiendishly acute. He gets to the very heart of the matter. Coleridge's early paralysis of genius was due to the absence of core in his personality, to an odd "selflessness" which rendered him capable of almost every sort of impression, and powerless in the formation of purpose which must lie behind all supreme creation. Hazlitt grasps this fact, makes it the centre of his

portrait, and puts in every touch to bring it into prominence and to give it effect. The essay on Wordsworth is almost as wonderful, and that on Scott (a Tory, we must remember) is a typical medley of magnificent compliment and frenzied abuse.

From his friendship with Lamb, Hazlitt no doubt gained an idea of the descriptive and discursive essay. At any rate, he is quite the chief of Lamb's rivals. He has not the same whimsicality, he does not jest quite so easily and so airily, and his style is less delightfully haunting; but he is not very far behind his master. Despite his bitterness of temper, he *did* love life and its experience. His account of the prize-fight is proof of that. Also he loved idle and desultory musing, as we can see by his essay *On Sun-dials*. Moreover, he loved to talk about himself, and that is the beginning of all good essay-writing. Lastly, his use of English is nearly always excellent, and sometimes it is very good indeed. His style has a peculiar keenness and vigour, the outcome of his own eager, restless, and trenchant mind.

It is, however, as a critic that he exercised his chief influence, and exercises it still. Along with Coleridge and Lamb he had a great share in giving to future criticism a sound view over the literature of the past, and (despite his frequent carping) he did a great deal to explain and defend the Romantics and their methods. How much he means to modern readers and writers is evident from the frequency with which he is quoted.

Both Hazlitt and Lamb were men of distinctive character, but neither was in any way so peculiar as Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859). His life was, during its earlier years, a very curious one, though it is hard

to say how far a vivid imagination later supplied the defects of his memory. As a lad he ran away from school in Manchester, and, after wandering for some time in Wales, found his way to London, where for a time he suffered excessive poverty and even want. From this he was rescued by his relations, who persuaded him to return to normal existence, and to go up to Oxford. But the period of privation had acted seriously upon his health and nerves, and while still very young he contracted the habit of taking opium. In 1807 he formed a friendship with Wordsworth and Coleridge, a little later became acquainted with Lamb, and in 1809 went to live at Grasmere. His devotion to learning and literature was great, and as time passed on his knowledge became almost as vast and curious as that of Coleridge himself. He certainly had all Coleridge's devotion to German philosophy. Meanwhile the opium habit grew hideously upon him, and it was not till after his marriage in 1816 that he was able to stamp it out of his life. The whole matter gave him material for his first and greatest book, *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), which tells his story in a prose-style that is absolutely unique. De Quincey did not believe in an essential difference between poetry and prose, and held that the latter could be as expressive of the romantic, the dreamy, and the strange, as the former. He was, moreover, interested in the subject of prose rhythm, and the owner of a very fine ear for its subtleties. Add to this huge and varied information and a very strange experience of life, and we have the main reasons why the *Opium-Eater* is perhaps the finest piece of prose-writing in the Romantic style. The secret of De

Quincey's manner is music, and we might almost call him a prose Milton for the grand and rolling harmonies he is capable of producing. Every phrase is carefully thought out and fitted into the sentence, every sentence is thought out and worked into the paragraph. Rhythms and cadences are balanced and repeated and varied as themes in a symphony are handled by a composer. Then De Quincey has colour as well; his prose is full of it, and full, too, of the strangeness of dreams—from exquisite and tender visions to nightmares of the wildest horror. The result is magnificent, and as long as people have ears to hear and eyes to see, the *Opium-Eater* will have its hosts of admirers.

De Quincey was a voluminous writer and a varied one. Not all his work by a very long way comes up to the splendid level of his first book. But everywhere there are fine things. His *Autobiography* contains many of them, and some of his later essays (*Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow* and *The English Mail-Coach*, for instance) rival the splendour of the *Opium-Eater* itself. He wrote a certain amount of criticism, and was at times a brilliant critic, as in his *Knocking on the Door in Macbeth*; at times an interesting one, as when he discusses his views of prose composition; at times merely inept.

As an influence he has carried very great weight indeed, and a great deal of modern prose is heavily indebted to him; but it is doubtful if the influence has been altogether for good. De Quincey, at least, had a personal experience to write of and a definite character, and his style is the outcome of these two factors. Ready as he is to build his splendid word-palaces on slight foundations, he has generally a foundation of

some kind. In the hands of his disciples, however, his manner has only too often been employed as a mere decoration, and as the garment for no body at all of thought or of emotion. In the nineteenth century, from 1850 to its close, "fine writing" became a rather disastrous fashion, and it is certain that to a great extent De Quincey was the father of it. A marked and peculiar style, the outcome of a marked and peculiar personality, is in every art liable to this form of abuse.*

* The author has thought it wiser to close his account of English prose with this chapter. In the Victorian Age the currents become so numerous and complicated that to extend the inquiry so far would have involved an impossible increase of bulk. In the following chapters some prose-writers, are, indeed, spoken of, but chiefly in their capacity as novelists.

CHAPTER XVII.

BYRON, SHELLEY, AND KEATS

I.

BOTH Wordsworth and Coleridge had given their best and greatest works to English poetry before the nineteenth century was many years old; both also modified their political views, if not their theory of poetry, and passed from warm support of the Revolution to bitter opposition. But the voice of Romance was not yet fated to silence; the doctrines of the revolutionary philosophers had not yet lost their influence. After a short and sterile interval, the Romantic and revolutionary music broke out with renewed force, and with even a more sweeping compass.

The chief Romantic elements in the poetry of Wordsworth were, as we saw, his mystical love of Nature, the high value set by him upon simplicity of life and feeling, and his revolt against the language and metrical system of the "classical" and "correct" school. These elements were powerful also in the work of Coleridge, who possessed in addition a peculiar sense of the supernatural and magical, a quite unique power of expressing it, and a keen interest in the life of the past.

The three great poets with whom we deal in this chapter were far more, and more permanently, moved

by the events and teaching of the Revolution than were their two predecessors. Two of them (Shelley and Keats) were touched by the literature of Greece and of Italy as was neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth; and one of them (Byron) opened to Romance a new world in the passion and colour of Oriental life. The last-named was the eldest of the group, and at the time certainly its most important and influential member. To Shelley he was united by a deep and abiding friendship, and though neither of them sympathised greatly with the poetry of Keats, each showed him active good-will and championed him against his literary enemies.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), was one of the greatest personalities in English literature. His enemies (who included his wife) were accustomed to speak of him as of one in the grip of demoniacal possession, and there is an intensity, a fierceness, and a recklessness in both his poetry and his life which gives a certain excuse to their language. His career was meteoric, and was an amazing mixture of the wildest and coarsest dissipation, the most frenzied application to literature, alternating with periods of profoundest idleness, and really sincere devotion to, and activity for, the cause of political and social freedom. His letters, the best record of him that we have, give us the idea of a man simply blazing through existence. As a Cambridge undergraduate we find him sharing to the full the wild life of a (then) very wild University. "Sorry to say," he frankly confessed to a lady correspondent, "been *drunk* every day, and not quite *sober* yet," and the confession is probably no exaggeration. However, though he never professed to be a scholar,

he read omnivorously both at Cambridge and as a boy at Harrow; and even when later he was enjoying the life of a young dandy in London, and filling his country house with prize-fighters and "bucks," he never lost his intellectual tastes or his pleasure in educated company. His literary taste was rather for the "Classical" than for the Romantic school of poetry, and Pope was his chief idol. Indeed, his first serious publication, his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), was a general onslaught upon the new school. His attack upon Sir Walter Scott ended in the foundation of a firm friendship (Byron's letter of apology is a masterpiece of grace and high-bred courtesy); and after Thomas Moore, a polished and pleasant minor poet (1779-1852), had challenged him to a duel, the pair became sworn allies and comrades. His early travels, which carried him eastward from 1809 to 1811, gave him the material for the earlier part of his *Childe Harold* and for his swinging verse stories of Oriental life, such as *The Giaour* or *The Bride of Abydos*. *Childe Harold* (at all events the earlier portion) is little more than a record of travel, in Spenserian stanzas of no great metrical skill or finished style. Byron, however, as his letters home show, had enjoyed his journey with enormous keenness, and he had the power of conveying his zest to his readers. Foreign voyages, we must remember, were far less common then than now, and Europe had been rendered especially difficult of access for some years by the revolutionary wars. *Childe Harold* caused its author to wake to find himself famous, and his popularity grew by leaps and bounds as he poured forth his vivid eastern narratives. None of these contains poetry of the highest kind; all show traces of

careless and hasty composition; all are under a heavy debt to the verse stories of Sir Walter Scott; but all appealed by the freshness of their subject and the rush and vividness with which they were told. All his life long Byron kept up a dandified affectation of contempt for the literary profession, and desired to pose as a "talented amateur." It is likely enough he would never have passed beyond the amateurism of these early works if in 1816, after a year of married life and the birth of a daughter, he had not quarrelled with his wife and left England never to return.

The cause of their difference remains a mystery. The poet's temper had been from childhood ungovernable, and Lady Byron was clearly a woman of a cold and unforgiving character. The solution is useless to seek. What is more important is that when he settled near Geneva he made the acquaintance of Shelley, and that acquaintance soon passed into friendship. If their friendship is less important and influential than that of Wordsworth and Coleridge, it is only very little less so. We shall best understand how they affected one another by describing Shelley's character, and giving a little attention to his early life.

II.

More than any other English man of letters Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) answers to the plain man's notion of the poet. From his childhood he had lived in a world of his own—a world of ideas and imagination and dreams, and throughout his life he was never a practical dealer with facts. Two forces dominated his

existence—the love of his fellow-creatures, both human and animal, and the love of beauty. The former led him to an eager and active championship of liberty and tolerance, and to an undying hatred of cruelty and oppression. His life at home, among a prosaic Sussex county family, and at Eton, was an unhappy and lonely one, and when he passed on to Oxford he earned the reputation of a madman, and was eventually expelled for the publication of a reckless attack on orthodox Christianity. This led to a complete breach with his parents, and the next few years he devoted to a number of wild schemes and ill-considered undertakings, which included his marriage with a girl in every way his inferior. His tendency to extreme Liberalism in politics was enormously strengthened by his reading of Godwin's *Political Justice*, which he had known at school, and later by his introduction to its author. William Godwin (1756-1836) was a philosopher who believed in and expounded the doctrine that all men are by nature capable of infinite perfection, and that their chief obstacle is the cramping force of government. At the time when Burke had stirred the upper classes in this country into a frenzied dread of a revolutionary outbreak, Godwin played no ignoble part as a friend of freedom, and his great work had attracted universal attention. Later, when Shelley claimed his acquaintance in an amazingly priggish letter (Godwin's reply is also a perfect example of priggery), he was in less honourable circumstances, though still a great influence over young men of enlightened mind. Friendship once formed between them, Shelley became his ardent disciple, almost his slave, and eventually deserted his wife for Godwin's daughter, Mary, with whom he was

travelling when he fell in with Byron. At the time he had already written (besides some pamphlets and very poor novels) his *Queen Mab*, a poem of many defects, but strong with his passion for liberty, and his *Alastor*, an allegorical account of the development of a poet's soul, with its superb descriptions of Nature and exquisite music of blank verse.

Shelley's was a great mind as well as a beautiful one. He possessed in a high degree the power of thought, as well as the love of truthful thinking, and he could give many a lesson to one so merely emotional as his new friend. "When he reflects, he is a child," Goethe, the great German poet and critic, said of Byron; but this is (though always, to some extent, a truth) distinctly less true after the famous friendship had begun. The third canto or part of *Childe Harold*, written during this memorable time, is more tinged with intellectual colour than anything Byron had written as yet. Moreover, it gives evidence that his admiration of Nature was being purified and made subtler by Shelley's influence, which is even plainer in a fragment of a *Prometheus*, produced at this period. The same wonderful summer also saw Byron at work upon his first and perhaps greatest drama, his *Manfred*. It is not a play written for the stage; in reality it is little more than a long soliloquy spoken by a haunted and remorseful soul (a parable of Byron's own). But it is full of fine poetry and of the grandeur of Swiss scenery. It was certainly a misfortune for Byron that he was unable to keep longer in Shelley's company. The younger man, in spite of his hatred for established creeds and his apparent erratic impulsiveness, was really of a deeply religious temper,

and lived rather in defiance of convention than of system. Upon his almost too sensitive refinement there is little doubt that the sheer force of Byron's immense personality acted as an over-boisterous wind upon a delicate flower. More than one passage of Shelley's correspondence suggests that his friend was, as we should say, "altogether too much for him," and his admiration for Byron's genius raised in him doubt and discouragement about his own. Against Byron's summer harvest of 1816 Shelley had to show only the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and his poem on Mont Blanc, though it is possible that modern criticism would value this slender sheaf higher than all Byron's crowded granary. At any rate, it was all to the disadvantage of the latter that Shelley returned to England for eighteen months, leaving his friend to pass on into Italy.

The few years that followed were the darkest period of Byron's life, a time when remorse for the past, hatred of the present, and despair of the future drove him to the coarsest debauchery and vilest companions. The English public had taken up violently the cause of his wife, and though it still admired him as a poet, execrated him as a man. He returned its execration with contempt, and began to think and write of himself as a tragic and lonely figure, driven into exile from all natural ties and holy charities, and forced ever farther on his path by memories of the wrongs inflicted upon him and of those he had inflicted upon others. During these years the legendary and demonic Byron, so to speak, the creation of his own sick fancy and of hostile rumour, nearly became a reality, nearly took the place of the fierce, uncontrolled, yet essentially

generous and noble Byron of his earlier and later years.

For all his misery he did not cease to write poetry. Rather he used poetry to express and deepen his morbid conception of himself. The fourth canto of *Childe Harold* (1817) is deeply shadowed by his "darkling mood," and though *Beppo* (1817) is a flash of real wit and gaiety, the first portion of his huge satiric epic, *Don Juan* (1818-19), is full of his spirit of lawless revolt and unhealthy scorn. In 1818 Shelley had for the last time left England for Italy, and when in the autumn of that year he visited Byron at Venice, the condition of his friend wrung from him a cry of pity in a famous letter to his friend Peacock. "He is heartily and deeply discontented with himself," Shelley wrote, "and contemplating in the distorted mirror of his own thoughts the nature and destiny of man, what can he behold but objects of contempt and despair?" A further picture of Byron's unhappy state occurs in Shelley's beautiful *Julian and Maddalo*, in which poem Maddalo is Byron, Julian Shelley himself.

"Pride

Made my companion take the darker side.
The sense that he was greater than his kind
Had struck, methinks, his eagle spirit blind
By gazing on its own exceeding light."

In the short preface to the poem he pays tribute to the charm Byron could exercise even in his darkest hours. "He is cheerful, frank, and witty. His more serious conversation is a sort of intoxication. Men are held by it as by a spell." It is interesting to notice that in the easy and familiar style of this work we have perhaps the solitary example of Byron's positive influence over Shelley's writing.

The eighteen months of separation had not been an idle period in the life of the younger poet. At Great Marlow he had read Spenser's *Faërie Queen*, and, stirred by its music and praise of purity and honour, had written his *Revolt of Islam*, a story of the love and comradeship of man and woman, and of rebellion against tyranny. His spirit, however, only bloomed in perfection under the Italian skies, and the four years which saw him settled at Venice, Naples, Rome, Pisa, and Lerici, saw also his greatest poems. The magnificent *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) is based upon a Greek legend, and in form is more like a Greek drama than an English one; but in spirit it is Shelley's very own, and free from influence of any kind. The force of love to redeem and repair the evil of the world is its subject, and Shelley celebrates his theme with the greatest outburst of pure lyrical singing that had yet been heard in our language. No music of the Elizabethans can approach it for sincerity, exquisite imagination, and delicate sweetness; no English poetry, not even that of Milton, had been so sure evidence of a huge intellect and mighty spirit. *The Cenci*, written in the same year, is a play on the model of our older dramatists, but has a beauty of form and a consistency in the drawing of character to which few of them attained. Its subject is a hideous tragedy of old Italian history, which (to the surprise of its unpractical author) prevented its production upon the stage. *The Masque of Anarchy*, the greatest of Shelley's political poems, was also written in 1819.

We must not pause here to speak of all his poems in detail. 1820 saw him produce the most beautiful of his many beautiful lyrics, *The Cloud*, *The Skylark*, and

others. Ere this the death of his first wife had enabled him to marry Mary Godwin, and his life now seemed far less storm-tossed and more full of promise than ever before. Friends gathered about him, and he had a further happiness in the reformation of Byron under the influence of the Countess Guiccioli.

This lady and his manly and loyal devotion for her were the turning-point in Byron's life. He met her first late in 1819. In 1821, when Shelley visited him at Ravenna, he was delighted to find his friend a new man. "L. B.," he wrote to his wife, "is greatly improved in every respect—in genius, in temper, in moral views, in health, in happiness." He is full of admiration for Byron's poetry at this time, and of despair at his inability to rival it (it is curious that his fine critical power should not have shown him his immeasurable superiority). Byron was certainly just then in the full glow of his genius. *Don Juan* was being vigorously continued; most of his plays were written in this year, and about this period he composed his finest satire, *The Vision of Judgment*, a splendid and audacious attack upon George III., Southey, and the general spirit of England.

Shelley still had great work to do both in the cause of freedom and of friendship. He served the former magnificently in the lyrical drama of *Hellas* (1821), the triumph of his powers as singer and writer of blank verse. The Greek revolt against Turkish rule stirred him to his deepest, and no poem of his is so passionate and aspiring, or so full of his faith in good. To friendship and love he offered his *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais* (both 1821)—the one the fairest and most spiritual song ever addressed by man to woman, the other the supreme

elegy for the dead which exists in our literature. He was busy on his *Triumph of Life* when a boating accident ended his days in July, 1822. Byron did not long survive him. In 1821 his earnest efforts for Italian liberty had ended in disappointment, and in July, 1823, he went to Greece to assist in the revolution. His splendid energy and wonderful power of dealing with men were just finding scope when in April, 1824, he died of an attack of fever at Missolonghi.

We have not space for much criticism of this famous pair of friends, but principally we must note that while Byron's reputation and influence, huge in his lifetime, have steadily waned since his death, those of Shelley, who had but a small following while alive, have steadily increased. The reason is not far to seek. Byron, as we have seen, was not a man of thought. His poetry is rather a passionate record of his emotions than a criticism of life. Moreover, he had no power of creating human characters. He could describe only himself. Lastly, he remained to the end an amateur. He never thoroughly mastered the craftsmanship of poetry. The age which succeeded him was one whose taste was for such formal perfection as that of Tennyson, and whose spirit needed a food stronger and more nourishing than a feast of emotionalism. In the later nineteenth century Byron had no direct literary descendants. He had taught the England of his time to break away from convention and the mischievous repression of the passions; he had forced her to see herself as she appeared to a critical Europe. So far he had done a great work; but he has had to pay the penalty of all those who forget that permanence in poetry is won only

by those who wed thought and style in a perfect union, and serve their art with a whole-hearted and laborious love.

Of Shelley, on the other hand, we may say that he is still in advance of the times, and that as progress creeps onward he only becomes a nobler and more beloved figure. This is largely due to the vastness and daring of his outlook; but we must not forget that he brought to poetry the most loyal service and a wonderful gift of language and of music. At his best he is as perfect in form as any of the Greeks, and many who misunderstand or fear his teaching are captivated and held by his literary beauty. He, too, failed to create character; he had none of the Shakespearean love of men and women for their own sake; he tended always to overlook actual things and individual persons in his zeal for huge and sweeping ideas. But he ever remained in love with spiritual and intellectual beauty, with truth, and with freedom; and his imagination enabled him to give to the objects of his devotion shapes of exquisite, if unearthly, loveliness. The fact that his poetry is a complete expression of his personality, and that his personality was an intensely original one, prevented him from becoming the first of a "school." His thought and his manner of giving it forth are his own and inimitable. T. L. Beddoes (1803-1849) has passages and moods which suggest him; Browning shows traces of his influence in his earlier work, and speaks of him with reverence as the "sun-treader." But his direct descendants are really none. Only upon all poets of revolt he has reacted to some extent. He is the greatest singer of freedom in our language, and his political poems made possible

such later writings as the revolutionary songs of Swinburne and Morris, and the sonnets of Mr. William Watson.

III.

John Keats (1795-1821) might possibly have figured as a third member in the friendship we have just been describing, had not his rather jealous love of independence and fear of influence caused him to avoid the companionship of Shelley, and his natural good sense been repelled by the flashiness of Byron. Unlike either of them, he was of humble birth, received but a poor education, and had none of the advantages which come from wealth and the opportunity of extended travel. He is with them only in the greatness of his genius and the tragedy of his early death.

We might safely say that his whole short life was a singularly pathetic one. The death of his parents early broke up his family circle, but did not break down the devotion which held the young Keatses together, and which is so beautiful an element in the poet's letters to his brothers and sister. After some indifferent schooling, John began the study of medicine, but science—at all events just then (he afterwards professed a desire and respect for all knowledge)—did not attract him. His mind, stimulated by the music, colour, and dreamy beauty of *The Faërie Queen*, had conceived a positive passion for poetry. Another strong influence urged him in the same direction when he began to study classical mythology and to read translations of the Latin and Greek authors. He has told us in a famous sonnet of the new world that opened before him with the reading

of Chapman's version of Homer. Literature became rapidly his supreme interest, and the taste was much increased by his falling in with Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), a clever journalist, critic, and minor poet.

Hunt's was not a great mind, but it was a very quick, clever, and versatile one. He was in full sympathy with Romantic ideas, especially with the Romantic zeal for liberty and the Romantic interest in the past. He had a wide knowledge of our older writers, as well as of the great poets of Italy; moreover, his circle of friends was a very large one, and included most of the leading literary men of the day. Such a friendship was bound to be important to a man so young, eager, and impressionable as was Keats. Hunt lent him books, shared with him in rhyming matches, and spent much time in his company. Keats, under his influence, read widely among the Elizabethans, learned to delight in Chaucer, and browsed right and left among the moderns. Two elements in his poetry he certainly owed to Hunt's example. One was a free use of the couplet—a way of letting the sense run on from line to line and of varying the pauses and rhythm; not at all in Pope's strict and formal manner. Another lies in a certain affectation, now overfamiliar, now mawkish, which is a distinct blot on much of his earlier verse.

The other poets of his own time influenced the young man but little. Wordsworth he knew personally, and greatly admired his genius; but though he saw him often, his robust sense of humour was offended by the great man's self-centred pompousness, and no trace of him is to be found in his poetry. He knew Coleridge also, was privileged to listen to his matchless talk, but was acute enough to see how sadly the other had

paltered with his vast gifts; and if Coleridge influenced him at all, it was but indirectly, in such poems as his *Belle Dame sans Merci*. From Shelley he differed profoundly as to the object and manner of their art. We find him advising Shelley "to be more of an artist, and to load every rift of your subject with ore." Byron he admired in a qualified way, but he did not care to meet him, and only once, in his unfortunate *Cap and Bells*, sought to follow in his footsteps.

His friendships, however, were many and deep. Charles Cowden Clarke (1787-1877) was the son of his schoolmaster, and was responsible for his first reading Spenser—perhaps the greatest service to literature in a long literary life. Through Hunt, Keats met John Hamilton Reynolds (1796-1852), to whom many of his best letters were written, and who had himself no small share of literary ability. Benjamin Bailey (1791-1853) was an Oxford undergraduate and student for Holy Orders when he formed acquaintance with the poet, and the affection between them was a very sympathetic and intelligent one. Keats spent some weeks at Oxford with Bailey, actually composing a part of *Endymion* there, and later Bailey took up his defence against his hostile critics. A fourth genial and loyal companion was Charles Armitage Brown (1786-1842), a frequent correspondent, with whom Keats carried out a delightful walking tour in Scotland. All these young men were keenly interested in Romantic ideas, and with them Keats could discuss literature without fear of the undue influence he dreaded in the case of Shelley. His letters to them were frequent, intimate, and full of the humour which does not appear in his poetry. His circle of friends also included the painters Benjamin Haydon

(1786-1846), whose devotion to classical art largely influenced him, and Joseph Severn (1793-1879), who nursed him during his last illness, and was buried beside him more than fifty years after his death.

If Leigh Hunt was the only living man of letters whom Keats did not fear to imitate, he was by no means so shy with the great poets of the past. His first volume (1817) is a curious index to his literary tastes and reading. The manner is nearly pure Elizabethan, with all the Elizabethan daring in the coining of words, and all the Elizabethan proud reverence for poetry as something high and holy. Spenser is the predominant influence in language, while in metre there are evidences of Keats' careful study of Spenser's successor, William Browne of Tavistock; but the book is, at the same time, full of originality. Keats loved letters, and he loved men; but Nature claimed a great share of his allegiance, and he brought to the study of Nature a wonderful power of perception, an ability to note and make fine use of the smallest detail of visible beauty. He did not, like Shelley, see through Nature's loveliness to a spiritual loveliness beyond; wood and sky and mountain did not speak to him as they did to Wordsworth of a moral order and law. He was contented to dwell upon externals, to delight in form and colour and perfume with a rare rapture of sensuous joy. The world ought to have realised from almost any poem in this volume that a new poet had arisen; as a matter of fact, the world did nothing of the sort. Leigh Hunt reviewed it favourably, but its failure was marked enough to make the publisher regret his undertaking. Keats, unmoved by the general neglect, published his *Endymion* in the following year, with a short preface acknowledging his

youth and his hope of higher performance in the future. The story is based upon a classical legend of a mortal beloved by a goddess, and is too short and slight for the length of the poem. There are many defects of forced rhyming, loose verse, and affected language; the mawkishness and overfamiliarity, due to Leigh Hunt's influence, are frequently visible; but *Endymion* is still a magnificent performance, full of passages and separate lines of exquisite beauty, and as clear a proof of genius as could be demanded. The orthodox critics, however, failed to see its merits, and writers in *Blackwood's* and *The Quarterly* covered it and its author with ridicule and insult. Keats, in reality, does not seem to have been disturbed overmuch by these attacks, and we must distrust the legend (principally due to Shelley's splendid, but hot-headed, championship) that they cut him to the heart and hastened his death. Any reader of his letters will remember a score of quotations proving the poet's scornful indifference to his critics, his high faith in his own genius, and his steady determination to use it to the full. "I have not the slightest feeling of humility towards the public," he wrote to Reynolds, "or to anything in existence, but the Eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of Great Men." Nothing could be farther from the facts than the picture of Keats as an hysterical youth, living in a world of dreams and unrealities, and dying of a review.

His correspondence gives us the idea of a very "flesh and blood" man, a "man's man," as we say (he complains of his shyness before ladies), with a love of good fellowship, laughter, and all forms of simple and healthy pleasure, and a sincere desire to be of service to his kind. It shows, too, his possession, not only of great

sensibility to art, Nature, and all impressions of beauty, but of a sound and cool intelligence, a fine critical gift, and a deep love of humanity.

Hostile criticism did not, at any rate, cause him to give up poetry, and in 1820 appeared the volume on which rests his supreme claim to the highest poetical rank. Here almost all the previous failings and excesses have been corrected and pruned away. From Dryden he had learned that in the writing of couplets freedom and flabbiness need not necessarily go together, and his *Lamia* is a triumph, not only in gorgeous colour, and in the telling of an eerie story, but a triumph of tense, strong versification as well. He had read widely and wisely for the last few years of his life, and could draw now upon a great wealth of material—upon Boccaccio for the sad story of Isabella and her murdered lover, upon Chaucer for medieval pageantry and detail, upon Milton for resonant splendour of verse and huge imaginative grouping, as in *Hyperion*, upon Shakespeare for pregnant and close-packed phrase. Moreover, now he was beginning to come at life for himself; the great odes *To a Nightingale*, *To Autumn*, *On a Grecian Urn*, show us a state of mind and attitude quite individual and his own.

But Keats was doomed only to look into the land of promise. Consumption, which had carried off his brother Thomas, had already laid its hand upon him. The disease was aggravated by the strain of a love-affair, fiercely, even bitterly, taken to heart. When he was ordered to winter in the South, Shelley wrote, with eager affection, inviting him to share his Italian home. He preferred, however, to travel with his devoted friend Severn, in whose arms he died in

Rome in February, 1821. His real epitaph is the immortal elegy *Adonais*, which Shelley dedicated to his memory and to the vindication of his claims as a poet.

We have to regret the loss of Keats more than that of Byron or Shelley, because their best and completest expression had probably been already found, while it is likely that his was yet undiscovered. He had sung immortally the beauty of Nature, of classic legend, and of medieval story; he had phrased perfectly moods of personal experience. It is likely, however, that as time passed and his grip on life strengthened he would have gone on to portray humanity and to the creation of character. There are hints of such a possibility in the letters and in many of the later poems. Our literature suffered an untold loss in its extinction.

Over subsequent poetry his influence has been great and direct. Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and Swinburne, are among the most famous and evident of his descendants. If we turned to the lesser poets, we should find the task of numbering them unending. So long, too, as "skies have colour and lips are red"—so long, that is, as Nature and man endure—his "sons" will continue to increase and multiply, though it is unlikely that among them will be born a genius so rare and so noble as his own.

CHAPTER XVIII

SIR WALTER SCOTT AND JANE AUSTEN

WE have seen that one of the earliest and most powerful elements in Romanticism is the renewed interest in history, especially that period of history which we should now call "feudal" or "medieval," but which the earlier eighteenth century contemptuously labelled as "the dark ages." In such poems as Coleridge's *Christabel* or *Ballad of the Dark Ladye* we have examples of the Middle Ages treated as the background to experience of an uncanny or wonderful kind. Their colour, their pageantry, their prominence in the chivalrous virtues, were, on the other hand, the qualities which attracted the vigorous, manly, and not very philosophical spirit of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832).

Brought up very largely on the farm of his grandfather in Roxburghshire, Walter Scott passed his childhood in a world of old traditions and stories of Border warfare and robbery. Eighteenth-century Scotland preserved far more of the spirit of Romance than did eighteenth-century England. The song (as we saw when speaking of Burns) had never wholly died out there, the old ballads were no mere literary curiosities to Scottish ears, but actual and living things; the land was permeated with memories of older times and full of a sad loyalty to perished and ruined causes. With

this spirit the boy grew up in perfect sympathy, a passionately eager reader of ballad, romance, memoir—any kind of literature, in fact, that spoke of his country and her history, a rapt listener to the legend and song of aged relatives and retainers. No devotion to professional business as he passed on to manhood (and he was a successful man of affairs, we must remember) turned him from this early love. He was in the exact sense of the word no scholar, as he himself admitted, but his general literary knowledge was great, and his knowledge of Scottish life, legend, history, and character simply enormous.

He won his fame as a poet, and his first success, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, appeared in 1805. A word or two about it will give us some idea of his poetry as a whole, of its merits and its defects. The story is a stirring one of Border warfare and Border love, with a large admixture of the awful and supernatural, and it is told in simple yet picturesque language, in a swinging metre, and with tremendous enthusiasm and keenness. From his childhood Scott was known as a story-teller, and the gift never failed him. His delight in a "good yarn," as we say, was immense, and he describes in one of his letters how a good narrative led him on, like a walk through undulating country, when the view from one hill simply forces you on to the next. His enjoyment is so real, so boyish (there was a wonderful boy's heart always beating in him), that he compels you to share it. He is like a happy child, too simple and generous to keep his pleasure to himself. So the story of the *Lay* sweeps along without a halt, through one scene after another of danger and arms and love and magic, and it stirs just those keen and simple feelings

in us which respond to tales of courage and arms and to the music of a verse as firm and regular as the feet of galloping horses. If we compared it to Coleridge's *Christabel*, we should recognise directly that its rhythm had none of Coleridge's variety and subtlety, none of his way of giving us a vision of its own; we should also recognise that Scott's "creepy" scenes—his old magician at his spells in the moonlight among the ruins of Melrose Abbey, for instance—are more theatrical and less really eerie than those of Coleridge. Scott has to describe where the genius of Coleridge allows him merely to suggest. To put it briefly, the verse of Scott lacks the qualities of the very highest poetry; to admit this should not prevent us from admiring its real merits, of which we have spoken above.

The Lay of the Last Minstrel found Scott a public, and the series of similar poems which followed it began to give him wealth. We need not linger over them here. Probably *Marmion* (1808) is the best, but the qualities of one are the qualities of all. Scott himself did not attach great merit to any one of them. They gave vent to his energy of mind, to his love of Scottish legend and scenery, and his taste for telling a good story; but no one of the number is so truly poetical as the short lyrics and ballads he wrote from time to time, more than one of which come very, very near to catching exactly the manner of the old Scottish minstrelsy. Still, had he died or ceased to write before 1814, it is unlikely that he would figure here as one of our most important leaders. At the beginning of that year the great work of his life still lay before him.

As far back as 1805 he had written some of the earlier chapters of a novel, and has told us himself how, long

after, he came on the dusty and forgotten manuscript and resolved to complete it. As always, he worked at a great rate, and thus *Waverley* saw the light. The book marked a revolution in the history of the English novel; it also aroused huge interest on account of the fact that its author withheld his name from the public, and that nearly every contemporary man of letters was at one time or another supposed to have written it. Apart from this, its actual merits won it immediate popularity. After this the series sped on at a rate and with an excellence that are nothing less than amazing, covering period after period of English, Scottish, and European history, and attracting the interest and expectation, not only of Great Britain, but of the Continent as well. For a very brief consideration we may divide them into two groups: those which deal with English and European historical subjects, such tales as *Ivanhoe*, *Quentin Durward*, or *Woodstock*, and those concerned with Scottish life and character, such as *The Antiquary*, *Rob Roy*, or *The Heart of Midlothian*. Of these two there can be little question that the latter is far the finer and more representative of Scott's genius. He had considerable power of painting the outward side of medieval life and of older history in general—its colour, splendour, and detail—but he was not capable of catching its spirit. He did not possess the gift known now as "the historical imagination," which enables a man to see back into the very soul of the past and make his own its way both of thinking and speaking. The characters of his purely "historical" novels live only in externals. Adventures befall them, but we never feel that we know them at heart; at best they are puppets with a wonderful reality of movement. The

voice with which they speak we always detect as that of the showman. With the definitely Scotch novels all is different and on a higher plane. Scott's foot once on his native heath, and he did indeed become "the Wizard of the North." Under his spell the wonderful Scotland of the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lived again—the Scotland of Claverhouse, of Flora Macdonald, of Bonnie Prince Charlie, and of Rob Roy. Its men and women—noble, small laird, outlaw, and peasant—rose again at his bidding and spoke with their own speech. More than once (but especially in *The Heart of Midlothian*) Scott surpasses in piercing vision and dramatic truth all his predecessors in prose fiction, and stands upon the very level of Shakespeare. The Scotch stories, too, give us the cream of his humour, of his delight in and understanding of such 'crusted' characters as Bailie Jarvie, Dominie Sampson, the rival antiquaries, and a host of others.

Long before the Waverley novels came to a conclusion, Sir Walter's authorship was admitted, and some years before, also, he had passed under the cloud of misfortune. In 1826 the failure of the Ballantynes, his publishers, involved him in debts of £130,000, and though numerous friends volunteered assistance (one anonymous correspondent offered £30,000), he refused their aid, and resolved to write off his liabilities. He left his great house at Abbotsford, moved into Edinburgh, and set himself to the gigantic task with patient and unswerving perseverance. The amount of work done by him in these years is prodigious, and he came wonderfully near to carrying out his project; but the strain of unceasing toil told upon him at last. The later Waverleys have not the freshness, vigour, and

charm of their predecessors. In 1830 his health broke down, and, though he received every care that loving friends and a sympathetic nation could bestow, he died on September 21, 1832.

No man of letters in this country ever held during his lifetime so high a place in the love of our people or came nearer to being a national hero—we might almost say a national possession. This was due hardly more to admiration of his genius than to respect for his character. Men and women all over these islands heard of his great loss, and watched his magnificent struggle against odds, with the tender sympathy they would have felt for a dearly-loved friend; and this affection Scott well deserved. He is a giant, not only among novelists, but among good and noble men. He has much of the toughness of grain we noticed as characteristic of Dryden and Johnson; but in him the elements were more kindly mixed than in either of them. With his strength went a great sweetness of character and a delightful joy in the good things of life. Till his great trial fell upon him, he showed no loss of that boyishness which made all experience seem to him some splendid adventure.

Even when misfortune did come, it did not wholly destroy his serenity and happiness, as anyone will know who reads the letters he wrote at the time. As a son, brother, husband, and father, he failed in no duty of tenderness and devotion, and as a friend he stood beyond comparison. His natural greatness of spirit enabled him to love those who stood outside the field of his opinions and interests—Wordsworth, for instance, whose Romanticism he probably did not understand, though Wordsworth paid him the compliment at least

once of imitation. Byron attacked him with violence. but Scott retorted with so fine a compliment to the young poet's genius that the possible feud vanished into good-will. His appreciation of other writers was ready and cordial. Southey, Maria Edgeworth, Joanna Baillie, to all of these and to many others he wrote delightfully of their performances. Moreover, no success spoiled him, and no lapse of time dulled his affection.

As a man of letters he stands in a peculiar position. His love of the past linked him to one side of the Romantic movement and caused him to exercise over it considerable influence. His poems, for instance, laid the path for Byron's highly-coloured verse romances of the East, and for many other attempts. His novels not only gave a new style of fiction to English writers, but also widened the whole cultivated mind of Europe, and set Frenchmen and Germans seeking to express in his manner the story of their own peoples. He showed the value of nationality as a subject for fiction exactly at the time when the sense of nationality was beginning to be a great force. Furthermore, he even influenced the study and writing of history, causing historical students and authors to pay much more attention to detail and to the reconstruction of the picturesque and vivid scenes of the past. The writing of history shows his influence throughout the middle nineteenth century, and of all subsequent historical fiction in this country he is more or less the father, as well as of that which deals with the peculiarities of local character and life.

In other respects, however, he stood quite apart from the thought of the Romantics. Of their philosophy he had no conception, nor of their deep sense of

the spiritual meaning and life of visible things. In this respect he held fast by the sound common sense of the eighteenth century. Moreover, he had no sympathy at all with Romantic ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality—with the thought of the Revolution. He was Tory through and through, though he never suffered political feeling to separate him from a friend, and was probably unmoved enough by Hazlitt's famous attack on him. Even as a novelist he is not very remote from the eighteenth-century writers. His revolution consisted in giving his fiction a new setting, not in inventing a new form. He is as fond of a "character" as Fielding or Smollett, and his heroes and heroines have at times no small touch of Richardson's sentimental insipidity.

Writing in 1822 to Joanna Baillie, Scott suggests that successful women of letters only too often carry their reputation as clumsily as an awkward milkmaid her yoke of pails. "By the way," he goes on, "did you know Miss Austen, authoress of some novels which have a great deal of nature in them?—nature in ordinary and middle life, to be sure, but valuable from its strong resemblance and correct drawing. I wonder which way she carried her pail?"* Had they met, Sir Walter would have been reassured that Jane Austen (1775-1817) "carried her pail" with extraordinary lightness and grace. No woman, surely, ever set less value on her own genius or assumed less of the air of a successful authoress. Reserved, quiet, and aloof, yet (as her letters show) singularly devoted to the duties

* Scott gave other and even stronger proof of his generous admiration for Miss Austen's delicate perfection, and on more than one occasion.

and ties of relationship and of her peaceful life, she passed the bulk of her uneventful days in country parsonages and villages; but their humdrum monotony did not reduce her to idleness or foolish activity. Under it her keen eyes could detect a play of feeling, even of passion, which stimulated one side of her artistic soul, as the affectations, "vapours," and pettinesses of her fellow men and women stimulated another. She needed no larger canvas. "Three or four families in a country village," she said, "is the very thing to work on;" and when later a wish was hinted from very high quarters that she should essay a loftier theme, she declined with polite firmness. "I could no more write a romance than an epic poem," she pleaded. From the first, indeed, she recognised the limitations of her art, and set herself to attain the highest possible results within them.

Her artistic success was immediate. *Sense and Sensibility*, her first novel (1811), is almost as perfect as her last. She was born with a consummate craftsmanship, we might suppose, from the perfect ease with which, from the very beginning, she tells her stories. Her novels only number six, but they are so even in skill and charm that no one could be quarrelled with who specified any particular one as his favourite.

"Romances," in the usual sense of the term, they certainly are not. Beyond an occasional elopement, their pages hardly contain an incident more extraordinary than could be afforded by the daily life of simple middle-class folk in simple middle-class circumstances. Her young ladies embroider, make a little music, compile volumes of elegant extracts, and visit the poor, with an odd dance or two for relaxation, just

as our own great-grandmothers did a hundred years ago. Sometimes they fell in love, and mostly they talked a good deal about each other, as the great-granddaughters of our great-grandmothers do to-day. Her young men danced, sang a little, assisted in the compilation of the volumes aforesaid, and took their share in the love-making and gossip; yet out of these ordinary young people Jane Austen makes heroes and heroines even more fascinating than those of the great Sir Walter, whom she so much admired. If you were told of her novels at second-hand, you would probably declare that they must have a certain insipidity; but that is exactly the fault they most perfectly avoid. Her girls, Lizzy Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), or Miss Woodhouse of *Emma* (1816), are a little sharp perhaps, a little overquick to spy out the weaknesses of their fellow-mortals, but insipid they are not; their humour is too exquisite and too persistent for that. Of course, she could describe silly people, such amazing asses as Mr. Collins or Mr. Elton, both parsons, by the way (had vicarage life lowered her respects for her father's calling?), such snobs as Lady de Burgh, such bores and ineffective simpletons as Mary, Lydia, and Kitty Bennet; but somehow her description makes them delightful. In her pages and under her spell we revel in company that in real life we should find intolerably tedious. She is as great a witch as Sir Walter is a wizard.

Even more than her great contemporary, she belongs to the eighteenth century. She has all its dislike of affectation and cant, all its reverence for good breeding, all its way of making the supreme standard a social one. Above all, she has the eighteenth-century belief

that satire is a finer and a better weapon than invective. When she meets vulgarity and folly, she does not get hot and excited and angry; she only smiles, and has a way of communicating her smile to her readers. Her shafts of ridicule are as airy and as pointed as those of Pope himself, and, unlike Pope's, they are never shot off in a temper. If, in her hatred of the base, Miss Austen has some of the spirit of an angel of judgment, all-seeing and relentless, she has also the daintiness of an English gentlewoman, and an English gentlewoman's self-control.

But we must not think of her as a merely satirical writer. She did not deliberately seek the fiercer passions, but when they faced her she did not shun them. *Mansfield Park* (1814) is a proof of that. Moreover, though she never married (she would have wished for Crabbe, the poet of rustic life, as a husband, she said whimsically), she had a sincere respect, even perhaps a wistful tenderness, for honest lovers. What a charm she throws over the final courtship of D'Arcy and Elizabeth Bennet! How we feel her sympathy for Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, the last of her books, finished only a few months before her death! How naturally she lets Emma Woodhouse pass from her long bickering with Mr. Knightley into love!

Living apart, she stood outside the great literary movement of her age, and is a figure in none of its famous literary friendships; but her influence upon the English novel was a very important one. If Scott taught subsequent writers to look for detail in the life of the past, she has taught them to see the value of detail in the life of the present; she has shown how great and how fair a harvest may be reaped from the

most apparently sterile fields. She did not, of course, invent the "novel of manners," the novel of ordinary life; that had been done by Richardson. Even in her own field she had been preceded by clever Fanny Burney, whom, as Madame D'Arblay, we mentioned as a friend of Johnson; but Miss Austen brought to the novel a finer gift of observation than any of her predecessors, and an almost Greek sense of form. She disposes of her slight material in a fashion so masterly as to be a lesson to all her successors, and she is supremely ingenious in her devices for bringing out her characters, now by a scrap of conversation about them, now by a letter, now by some revealing word or phrase. But perhaps her greatest technical service lay in her use of selection, her careful paring away of the superfluous, so as to attain a clear and definite outline.

To a great extent all subsequent novelists of ordinary life have profited by her teaching, but those who have trodden most directly in her footsteps have been mostly women; her "family" is one of daughters. Mrs. Gaskell, perhaps, is the greatest among them, but they are as the sands of the sea in number, and include some of the cleverest women-writers of our own day.

If the great masters of the eighteenth century invented the novel in its true form and gave it all its limbs, we may claim for Scott and Miss Austen that they enormously increased the field of its activity.

CHAPTER XIX

TENNYSON AND BROWNING

I.

WITH the death of Byron, in 1824, the Romantic Movement in English poetry may be said to close. Its philosophy, its view of man and nature, and its joy in beauty, as well as its revolution in the metre and language of verse, were to exercise an unbounded influence upon the poets of the succeeding age; but not again, between then and now, has England ever burst into song with such spontaneousness as in the wonderful twenty-six years that followed the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. In poetry the Victorian period was to be exceptionally rich, but its singers grew up in an atmosphere less hopeful and clear than that of the earlier years of the century, and none of them is quite free of the sense of trouble and perplexity due to the vanishing of old hopes and the coming of new problems.

To the majority of men at this time the French Revolution, which had opened with such splendid promise for all Europe, had seemingly ended in failure. The Age of Reason and of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality had closed in massacre and confusion, had been followed by a military despotism, and by the restoration of monarchy. Over twenty years of bloodshed and turmoil had resulted apparently in a return

to the old order. As time passed on it grew clearer that the Revolution was a leaven working steadily in the mind of the West. Thinkers came to realise that its purposes were being fulfilled even better in years of peace and gradual development than they had been in the first period of explosive violence; but this knowledge came slowly, and the twenty years that followed the Bourbon Restoration were, to most lovers of freedom and champions of popular rule, an age of depression and disappointment.

In the meantime science and philosophy were raising a host of new and urgent questions—questions which seemed at the time to threaten the religious and moral system of Christians. Geology gave conclusive proof that the world had not come into existence by a sudden act of creation. The doctrine of evolution suggested that man and all his activities, his busy life of politics, art, and industry, might be nothing more than a comparatively brief phase in an unthinkably huge process of development. A new reading of history, which presented Periclean Athens as more cultured, medieval Europe as more truly religious, than the world of the present, dealt a shattering blow to the complacent eighteenth-century notion of the progress of civilisation. Discoveries of one kind and another were extending enormously the means of transit and of communication, and were thus beginning to break up the old ties which limited man's view over the globe to the experiences of the grand tour for the aristocrat, of his own country for the man of the middle-class, of his own parish or city for the peasant or artisan. A tide of new thoughts and new possibilities broke in upon the mind of that period, so overwhelming as to cause

a profound confusion, and set men seeking in vain for the old landmarks. It was highly needful that the best spirits of the time should undertake the task of discovering just the exact extent of change wrought by this flood, of seeing how much of the old could be usefully retained, of testing the new, and of guiding and comforting souls less gifted and less strong. It is all to the credit of the great poets of the earlier Victorian era that none of them refused his share of the burden, that each in his way sought to give to the world some message of reassurance and of hope, or, at least, of courage.

Alfred Tennyson was born in a quiet Lincolnshire parsonage in the year 1809, and into a family of refined and poetical character. From childhood he possessed many of the imaginative qualities, scribbled verses, grieved over the news of Byron's death, and could be moved to tears by the repetition of certain Romantic phrases. He had also the poet's love of Nature, and many of his best lines recall the charm of the Lincolnshire scenery and the humour of the Lincolnshire peasants. The home was a strict one, but the young Tennysons contrived to get a good deal of pleasure and fun out of their quiet life, and to gain some notion of the leading events and ideas of the time. It was, however, when he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1828, that the really important influences of his life began to act upon him.

Tennyson was emphatically a man of friendships, and with a wonderful gift of attracting the best men to his company. To read his biography is to make the acquaintance of nearly every great English writer of his time; Johnson, a century before, had hardly so wide

and so splendid a circle. And Cambridge, when he studied there, was just the place for the beginning of such a career of noble fellowship. Here he met for the first time, and came rapidly to love, more than one man whose name was to have a glory of its own. There was Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton; R. C. Trench, later Archbishop of Dublin; John Sterling, who was to become a well-known journalist; W. H. Brookfield, "Old Brooks," whom Tennyson delighted in as the most amusing of men and best of friends; James Spedding, the critic; F. D. Maurice, the great leader of Broad Churchmanship; W. M. Thackeray, the poet's staunchest admirer till the day of his death; and many others. All these young men were abrim with keen thinking, full of hospitality for Liberal ideas, and enthusiasts for the poetry of the great Romantics. More than one of them had considerable poetic gift of his own, and in their company Tennyson learned to abandon Byron, his earlier idol, for Keats, whose influence was to be so marked a one over some of his finest work.

In his *In Memoriam* the poet has left us a vivid picture of the eager, intellectual, and spiritual life of his Cambridge set; but that great poem is dedicated to the memory of one dearer and closer to him than any of those we have mentioned. Arthur Hallam (1811-1833) was the elder son of Henry Hallam (1777-1859), himself a great historian and man of letters. The impression produced by him upon all those with whom he came in contact was one of extraordinary beauty and nobility of character and promise of a great future. "He was as near perfection as mortal man could be," Tennyson said of him long after; and their Cambridge friendship

was the supreme experience of the poet's life, a love that was built upon perfect mutual understanding, mutual respect for genius, and which glorified for ever to Tennyson the memory of "those dawn - golden times." His own description of their relationship is so perfect that any other is an impertinence:

"The path by which we twain did go,
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,
Through four sweet years arose and fell,
From flower to flower, from snow to snow.

"And we with singing cheered the way,
And, crowned with all the season lent,
From April on to April went,
And glad at heart from May to May:

* * * * *

"When each by turns was guide to each,
And Fancy light from Fancy caught,
And Thought leapt out to wed with Thought
Ere Thought could wed itself with Speech.

"And all we met was fair and good,
And all was good that Time could bring,
And all the secret of the Spring
Moved in the chambers of the blood."

The young men shared every thought together—thoughts on religion, on philosophy, on liberty (both were earnest Liberals), and Hallam was full of admiration for his friend's genius, for Tennyson was already famous as a poet among his Cambridge companions. "I consider Tennyson," Hallam wrote to Gladstone, "as promising fair to be the greatest poet of our generation, perhaps of our century." There is always in a comradeship so frank and perfect as this a great deal of wholesome give and take and mutual criticism, and there is no doubt that Tennyson profited greatly both by Hallam's advice and by his really great learning.

Later, when in his poems of English life he sketched those graceful young heroes of his, scholars and men of the world almost as perfect as Sir Philip Sidney, we may surmise that his mind was travelling back to the dead friend of his youth. In 1831 the poet had the happiness of seeing his friend become engaged to his sister Emily.

In 1832 Tennyson published his second volume of verses. It contained several poems which (in a revised and altered form) have come to be among those most cherished by critics, and gave ample proof of his gifts. There were immaturities. Coleridge noticed a weakness of metrical power, and there is an absence of "high seriousness" and passion. But Tennyson's mastery of language and his keen sensitiveness to beauty were fully revealed. Leigh Hunt welcomed the young man as a coming poet, and in the Cambridge he had just left he was exalted to rank with the giants of our literature.

If at this period he lacked the deeper note, experience of life was soon to enable him to attain it. In 1833, while Hallam was travelling with his father,

" Beneath Vienna's walls
God's finger touched him, and he slept."

For the time the blow was to Tennyson an absolutely crushing one, and as his mind recovered from the first stunning shock, it only awoke to innumerable doubts and questionings. Hallam's premature death, with all his magnificent promise unfulfilled, aroused in him the same mood of rebellion against Fate, and of wonder as to the workings of Providence, which had been stirred in Wordsworth by the failure of his hopes

in the Revolution. *In Memoriam*, which largely occupied the next sixteen years of his life, is his poetic account of his conflict with this spiritual trouble, and of the path—or rather paths—by which at last he came to resignation and peace of mind. It is also his supreme tribute of love to his friend. We cannot pause here to speak of it at any length. We must only notice in passing that it is something much wider and greater than a poem of merely personal loss. In the course of it Tennyson takes up nearly every question with which philosophy, history, and science were vexing the religious mind of that day, and suggests answers and reconciliations. As pure poetry it stands on a level with the very best of his work. It is full of magical phrases, exquisite glimpses of natural beauty, and its rhythm is a miracle of skill. Gone completely is the suggestion of trifling which had marred some of his earlier efforts. His voice here is deep, sad, and haunting, with the note of actual knowledge of grief.

The earlier years after Hallam's death were full of other sorrows for his friend. The loss of his father caused him to leave the loved home of his youth, and his poverty stood for fourteen long years as a barrier between himself and the lady he afterwards married. But in those years he perfected himself in his art, and the publication in 1842 of his revised early poems and of many new ones established him as the chief English poet of his day. The volumes of 1842 are evidence to the completeness with which he had laboured to cure his early failings, and to the width and depth of his reading and scientific studies. No poet since Milton had shown such vast stores of learning, such a wonderful power of using in a new setting and a new

way material that had been handled before, or such a gift for applying the conclusions of science to the purposes of poetry. Nor were these years, in spite of the fact that his friend of friends was no more, lacking in the consolations of friendship. He kept up with all his old Cambridge companions, to whom had long been added Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883), whom he had not actually known at the University. FitzGerald was a man of letters to the tips of his fingers, and a companion after Tennyson's own heart, who could jest or criticise, or be wisely silent, as the poet's mood demanded. To us he is best known by his great translation of the Persian poet Omar Khayyâm, and by letters as delightful as any ever written. With "Fitz" Tennyson kept up intimate relations till the former's death. In London during these years he saw much of literary society, and, among other men of note, associated freely with Thomas Carlyle, the great Scottish historian, critic, and philosopher. Between the two men, both rugged, unconventional, and sincere, a thoroughly good feeling existed, and Carlyle has left us a delightful pen-portrait of the poet: "A fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man is Alfred; dusty, smoky, free and easy . . . a most restful, brotherly, solid-hearted man."

Dickens, Thackeray, and many more of the Victorian giants move across the scene at this period, and from all Tennyson won that peculiar mixture of affection, admiration, and respect which the world seemed to pay him as a right. But no friend after Arthur Hallam acquired a real ascendancy over his mind and spirit. In the greatest lives such love comes but once; in most lives not at all. From Hallam's

death onwards the art of Tennyson was uninfluenced by any of his contemporaries, except in so far as some of his later work (*Romney's Remorse*, for instance) owes something to the example of Browning.

We may take the year 1850 as the turning-point of Tennyson's fortunes. In that year his *In Memoriam* was published, and made him the representative of the best English thought, as well as the greatest of England's living singers. His position now allowed of his marriage; and on the death of Wordsworth, he succeeded to the office of Poet Laureate. His remaining many years of life were one long growth into the heart of the English people, with whom he came to stand as a sort of national possession. Of his later works we must speak briefly before adding a final word or two on his complete achievement and influence.

In 1847 appeared his *Princess*, a long blank verse poem on the subject (then comparatively fresh) of the position and education of women. Like his other large compositions (with the exception of *In Memoriam*), it is lacking in constructive power and ability to arouse human interest, though both versification and language are enough to give it charm. Later Tennyson divided its various sections by inserting songs of exceptional grace and beauty. The same vagueness of form and weakness in dealing with character mar the effect of *Maud* (1855), a story of passionate and unhappy love, told by a single central figure in a series of lyrics. The poem is full of fine passages, exquisite description, and varied music, and it contains a love-song of unapproached splendour—by far the greatest love-song in our language. But the whole work fails to grip. It is essentially undramatic. The hero and

speaker never stirs our sympathy, and Maud never disturbs our first impression of chilly aloofness.

To most of his contemporary readers Tennyson seemed to put the crown on his work by the *Idylls of the King*, which appeared gradually during the latter half of his life. They form, in their completeness, a sort of small epic on the great theme of Malory; but they want the unity and strength which are essentials of the true epic poem. Moreover, if we except the last, which had largely appeared in 1842, we shall notice throughout them a certain loss of glow and force, and a considerable tendency to diffuseness. Really, Tennyson did not understand the spirit of the Middle Ages. Their colour and pageantry fascinated, but their ideal of manhood was remote from, him. Arthur Hallam remained his hero for life; and though Hallam might have united culture and practical life as perfectly as Gladstone in the nineteenth century, or Sidney in the sixteenth, he would have been sadly out of place in medieval court or castle. Tennyson's King Arthur is a Victorian gentleman of Hallam's type astray in Camelot, and this failure in reality of the central figure is fatal to the whole work. The poet's earlier medieval poems, such as the *Sir Galahad* or *The Lady of Shalott*, are far more successful and convincing.

It would be mistaken, however, to suppose that after middle life Tennyson fell into poetic decay. If we lost the work of his later years, we should lose much poetry of very high value indeed. Steadily, as he grew older, he became more interested in the study of human passion and character, and to this interest we owe such masterpieces as his studies of peasant

and rustic folk in the Lincolnshire dialect—*The Northern Cobbler*, *The Northern Farmer*, and others. From things so excellent, his *Rizpah*, the lament of a mother for a strayed and lost son, stands out with a unique excellence of its own. Stark, stern, and alive in its every syllable, *Rizpah* is Tennyson's best claim to rank with the masters of the human soul. No passage in any of his dramas is so admirable in truth, though to underrate the dramas is certainly a tendency of modern critics. They are not great; they are not perfectly constructed; no character in them stands out in the full and perfect likeness of life. But they have their dramatic moments and their merits of fine verse and language. We shall notice, too, in the later works a certain number of poems, brief expressions of mood and temper in some historic character, which witness to Tennyson's increasing power to portray men and women. *Sir John Cobham* and *Romney's Remorse* are poems of this class, and are further interesting as showing something of the influence of Browning. To the end the lyric gift, the gift of mere exquisite song, never wholly left Tennyson, and his *Crossing the Bar*, written in extreme old age, is as full of music and beauty as the songs of his youth.

It is not easy, in the case of a poet so near to ourselves, to judge of his final place in literature or to estimate his influence. He represented so thoroughly the mind of his country in the Victorian era that his contemporaries were apt to overpraise him, and to overpraise him for just the qualities in his work which were most ephemeral and least artistic. To many critics and readers of to-day the Victorian spirit seems either remote or repellent, and accordingly they are

disposed to belittle its spokesman. It is a sounder and a safer method to approach Tennyson rather as poet pure and simple than as the possessor of any given set of ideas or preacher of any definite gospel. And he certainly repays such a treatment. Most of his work in the volumes of 1842 is really free of teaching intention, and is devoted to the interpretation of beauty in a spirit as purely artistic as that of Keats. *Ænone*, *The Lotus-Eaters*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, *Ulysses*, and many others, have no "message" other than that which is common to all great poetry, and which is addressed to the heart rather than to the head. The same is true of the exquisite lyrics that stud his poetical career like jewels; true, too, of much of even his late and more ambitious work. In spirit (though with a very different outlook) he is really as purely lyrical as Shelley. His primary instinct is to sing, his steadfast endeavour to conform, even in treating a weighty theme, to the right way of song. With the vast mass of his poetry the estimate of the critic should depend upon the artistic effect produced by language and metre. By this Tennyson must stand or fall. To drag him to trial and condemn him for his opinions is to misunderstand his whole aim and life-work. If he is not one of our greatest masters of phrase and rhythm, he is nothing. The best critics in his own day certainly took him for one, and we have yet to meet and defeat them on this ground.

In his own day his influence, both here and in America, was profound and extensive, and his imitators were innumerable. Men of quite different and even opposed schools of thought submitted to the grace of his style. Of his immediate disciples, Coventry

Patmore (1823-1896), in his earlier work, is the most remarkable. Patmore's *Angel in the House* is instinct with the Tennysonian love for the dignity and culture of refined English home-life, and with Tennyson's tender chivalry towards womanhood. The very language has caught the Tennysonian ring, and phrase after phrase might be easily mistaken for Tennyson's own. Yet Patmore was a man of quite different temperament and outlook. Lord de Tabley (1835-1895) is another example of the same thing, and these poets are only two out of many. We stand too near Tennyson himself to forecast the future extent of his "family"; but his exquisite care for form has already had a vast influence in giving minor writers a model for the short lyric, while his skilful use of older material, his employment of blank verse, and his delight in the beauty of legend and myth, have gone far to shape the best poetry of Mr. Stephen Phillips and the writers of his school.

II.

With Alfred Tennyson his friend and fellow-poet, Robert Browning (1812-1889), stands in almost complete contrast. Whereas Tennyson is above all things a poet of gracious language and delightful music, Browning wins us to admiration rather by the force and sweep of his intelligence, while the material of his work is rugged, often harsh, and sometimes positively repellent. Tennyson began his poetical career as a worshipper of beauty (as a "son" of Keats, in fact), and only in middle life began to feel the need for dramatic expression; Browning from the outset found his in-

spiration in human nature and human experience. From the first his poetry was "in principle dramatic." Again, Tennyson may be described as the "heir of all the ages" of poets who had gone before him. He stands in some relation or another to almost every great singer of the past. Browning, on the other hand, is singularly untouched by literary influences. In his early youth he paid the tribute of imitation to Shelley, but this was merely a passing phase. The main body of his work is nobody's but his. He has no literary forebears, is no man's "son." As a final point of contrast, we may notice that Tennyson is before all things a poet of England and of English life and culture; while Browning, despite his deep love for his own country, fails to draw from it his highest inspiration. Italy and Italian character meant more to his art than the land and people of his birth.

After noting all these differences, it will be well for us to try to realise certain likenesses between the two men. One similarity, and a very important one, lies in their common glorification of love, the love of friend for friend, and the love of man for woman. Browning's life and thought, indeed, were dominated by no such master-feeling as bound Tennyson to Arthur Hallam; but the record of his friendships is a very distinguished one, and his service to them was very loyal and devoted. For a deeply-loved kinsman he cried out with a tenderness of regret that is not far from "the exceeding bitter cry" of Tennyson's early days of loss:

"I wish that when you died last May,
Charles, there had died along with you
Three parts of spring's delightful things;
Aye, and, for me, the fourth part too."

And though Tennyson wrote, as we said above, the fine flower of all English love-songs, Browning surpassed him completely in his width of sympathy with the passion, his insight into it, and his power of representing its moods of regret and reflection. The superb address to his wife which preludes *The Ring and the Book*—

“ O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire,”

is only one jewel from the crown of his poetry on this subject. His range is tremendous, passing from the wistful wonder of an elderly man at the bedside of a dead girl, in *Evelyn Hope*, to the horrible picture of *Porphyria's Lover* propping on his shoulder the head of the woman he has strangled. Beside his wealth of feminine portraits, the gallery of Tennyson seems restricted and a little colourless. The two poets are alike, moreover, in a high sense of their vocation. Each from early manhood dedicated himself to his art, and scorned the idea of any other profession. Each, moreover, used that art as a noble and sacred trust for the delight and betterment of his fellows. Neither was content to dwell apart from the storm and stress, the problems and contentions, of his own day in any palace of his own imagination.

And as these two men were great separately, each in his own fashion as poets, so they were great in friendship for each other, unspoiled by the least touch of envy, such a friendship as might have been shared between two knightly heroes of some old romance. Each had the most cordial admiration of the other's genius. Tennyson was not prone to feel deep sympathy for the work of his contemporaries; but of two

of Browning's poems, *Bishop Blougram's Apology* and *Evelyn Hope*, he confessed that he would have wished to have written the former for its cleverness, the latter for its beauty. And to his son, Hallam, he said: "He has a mighty intellect. . . . I wish I had written his two lines—

" 'The little more and how much it is,
The little less and what worlds away.' "

Certainly, among the poets of his own day, it was Browning only who, as we saw in the case of some of the later poems, influences his work. Letters were frequent between them, and, whenever Browning left his Italian home for England, they met on terms of intimate affection. The present Lord Tennyson has preserved a delightful memory of their intercourse: "Browning frequently dined with us," he wrote. "The *tête-à-tête* conversations between him and my father on every imaginable topic, when no one but myself was with them, were the best talks I have ever heard, so full of repartee, grip, epigram, anecdote, depth, and wisdom; but it is quite impossible to attempt to reproduce them, owing to their very brilliancy. These brother-poets were two of the most widely read men of their time, absolutely without a touch of jealousy, and revelling, as it were, in each other's power."

It is a beautiful picture. Let us close it with some words of love and admiration sent by Browning, then himself an old man, to his friend on his eightieth birthday: "To-morrow is your birthday, indeed a memorable one. Let me say I associate myself with the universal pride of our country in your glory, and in its

hope that for many and many a year we may have your very self among us: secure that your poetry will be a wonder and delight to all those appointed to come after; and for my own part let me further say, I have loved you dearly. May God bless you and yours!"

A friendship and love of an even higher and certainly more influential kind in Browning's life was that which brought about in 1846 his marriage with Elizabeth Barrett (1806-1861), herself a poetess and a woman of very great intellectual power. The union had an element of true romance, owing to the hostility of Mrs. Browning's father, and was carried out secretly, the pair eventually settling in Florence. In her splendid series of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* Mrs. Browning has given the spiritual side of the story, in what is certainly the greatest love-poem ever written by an Englishwoman. Upon her husband the influence of this adventure, and of the fifteen happy years that followed it up to her death in 1861, was very important, for Browning is pre-eminently the poet of married love. No one has analysed so subtly as he the emotions of man and woman under this supreme experience and test. *By the Fireside* and *Any Wife to Any Husband* are miracles of insight and of sympathy. The years of Italian life deepened the profound impression already made upon him by the

" Woman-country, wooed not wed,
Loved all the more by earth's male lands,
Laid to their hearts instead;"

and his finest work after he took up his abode there lay in the treatment of Italian life and character.

Unlike Tennyson, Browning was slow to win popu-

larity. His first work, *Pauline* (1833), reached but a tiny circle, and though *Paracelsus* (1835), a drama of love without knowledge and knowledge without love, won the notice of Carlyle, Wordsworth, and other distinguished men, it did little to make the poet known or loved by the world. His difficulty of thought, his harshness of language and metre, his love of subjects drawn from foreign and out-of-the-way sources, all contributed to this result. And when, in 1837, he appealed more directly to the public with his play of *Strafford*, acted by Macready and Helen Faucit, it was without success. Always "in principle dramatic," his poetry is too much interested in thought and argument, too little interested in action, for ordinary stage-production. This is true of all the plays that followed. They are full of the finest poetry, they are human in the highest sense of the word, but they have no element of theatrical movement and interest.

The poet, odd as it may sound, wrote his most dramatic work when he abandoned the theatre; for we must remember that the supreme quality of the dramatist is the power to create character, to throw himself into the lives and souls of others, and make real to us their passions and emotions. This gift Browning possessed to a higher degree than any English poet since Shakespeare, and he exercised it best when he forgot the stage, and wrote such dramas as *Paracelsus* or *Pippa Passes*, never intended for acting, or such portraits of moods and passions and temperaments as the poems he called "Dramatic Monologues." In these the speaker, often some historic personage, explains himself, his experience of life, and his philosophy. And among them we shall find Browning's

masterpieces. He sweeps over history with a wonderful breadth of view and with profound knowledge. Pheidippides, the splendid athlete, who helped to save Greece from Persia, lays bare his simple manly soul as he tells of his great race from Athens to Sparta, and from Sparta back to Athens. The dying Italian bishop of the Renaissance tells of his love for "brown Greek manuscripts," and all beautiful things, of his hate for a dead rival, of the haunting superstition that lingers yet to make him afraid. *Mr. Sludge, the Medium*, describes his trickeries, sneers at the gullibility of his dupes, yet clings to a belief that he has his moments of genuine vision and inspiration. It is, indeed, an inexhaustible gallery. But its most precious treasure lies in the series of monologues entitled *The Ring and the Book*, wherein a hideous crime of Italian life in the late seventeenth century is described by each of the participants in turn, and discussed by various interested and disinterested outsiders. This is Browning's triumph of dramatic insight and power.

If the poet held fast to the Romantic school in his view and employment of history, he held equally fast to it in his conviction of the spiritual meaning of the world and of life. As against the cold thinkers who ridiculed the testimony of the heart, and explained the universe as a soulless process, a remorseless working of laws, he asserted his profound and fearless faith that—

" This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good."

Even apparent evil and failure had their place as forms of unfulfilled righteousness, were only as silence, the contrast and condition of beautiful sound. It is im-

possible here to attempt to explain his philosophy. Suffice it to say that it preceded and influenced profoundly much of the best thought of our own day, and was in its conclusions even more religious and hopeful than that of Tennyson. To the last Browning remained—

“ One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.”

It is only to be regretted that after the publication of *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69) he showed a steady tendency to lose the just balance between thought and emotion in his poetry, to reason too much, and to sing too little. His work after this date suffers greatly from an excess of sheer argument, and becomes even obscurer and harsher than before. It has splendid poetic flashes up to the very end, but they are rare glories in a cloud of metaphysics.

As his warmest, highest, and best inspiration died away during these later years, his fame increased among his countrymen. Not, indeed, that he ever reached so wide a circle as Tennyson. Men and women of culture, however, both here and in America, came to realise his true greatness. Societies were started for the study of his works, and honours of all kinds fell thick upon him. His death in 1889 was a real grief to a very large and very cultivated world, and his burial in Westminster Abbey was a befitting proof of his high position.

It is probable that to our day he stands closer and dearer than does his great contemporary and friend.

At all events, his influence is wide and powerful. Upon the form of poetry it tends to be passing. Most clever young writers of verse have shown their admiration of him by reproducing his peculiarities; the wise among them have abandoned such a course. In the dramatic monologue as a means for the vivid portrayal of character he gave a great discovery to our literature. This alone would make him a leader. There are signs that his gift will not be unfruitful in the future. In the widening of the scope of poetry, the finding for it of new worlds to conquer, and in the deepening of its reflective power, his influence is simply incalculable.

CHAPTER XX

DICKENS AND THACKERAY

BETWEEN the two great novelists about whom we are going to read in this chapter there is almost as great a contrast as between the two great poets we have just been considering. No two men could differ more thoroughly in character and temperament, in education and early life, and in their method of writing. To the one success came very early, to the other comparatively late. So wholly, indeed, are they opposed that their admirers are apt to divide into two camps, each set extolling the merits of their favourite, and belittling those of his rival. It is wiser, however, to avoid a comparison of this sort, and to attempt to recognise the greatness of each without "taking sides" with either.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was the son of a clerk in the Navy Pay-Office, and his father was a thriftless and extravagant individual, whose "feckless" ways did much to deprive his children of proper education, and to darken the happiness of their youth. At one time they even shared his life in the Marshalsea Prison, where the harsh law of that day allowed debtors to be confined; and Charles began earning his living as a subordinate in a blacking factory. Physically delicate and mentally sensitive, the lad suffered extremely

during this period of hardship; but his youth was not all sadness. He read then the works of the great eighteenth-century masters, Fielding and Smollett, acquired his lifelong love of the theatre, and gained a knowledge of the "seamy side" of existence, which later proved to be of the greatest service to him. A change in his family fortunes rescued him from a life he hated, and enabled him to enter a solicitor's office; but, like many another great writer, he was to serve the law only for a short time. In 1836 he published his first volume, *Sketches by Boz*, and in the following year he was invited to write descriptive letterpress for some comic sporting illustrations. This was the germ of *The Pickwick Papers* (1837-1839), which at once established him as the most popular writer of the day. After this he never looked back. Volume after volume only increased his reputation, and his famous readings from his own works set up between himself and his public a sort of personal relationship of a unique kind. Over his own generation his spell was unbroken, and his death deprived his countrymen of a friend as well as of a loved and respected author.

Let us now go back to his *Pickwick Papers*, and consider them rather carefully. The effort will repay us, because the book is not only the most certain to survive of all his works, but is also the most perfect mirror of the man himself and of his way of writing fiction. *Moreover, it serves as a link between him and Thackeray, and formed the beginning of their rathered chequered friendship.

Pickwick, then, to give it the abbreviated title we all use, as if it were the nickname of a beloved friend, is really not very like a novel in the ordinary sense of

the term. It has practically no plot, but describes the comic adventures of a group of four companions who set out together to see the world. Town and country, farmhouse, coaching-inn, and London lodgings, all shelter them in turn, and as they wander on they come in contact with nearly every phase of the English life of the day. They attend country dances and cricket matches; they take part in a parliamentary election under the old rules of personal abuse and rotten eggs; they get glimpses of the queer life of third-rate attorneys and their clients; they visit Bath, still then a place of fashion; they see the humour and the pathos that mingle behind the grey walls and iron bars of a debtors' prison. The rambling method, which was due, to begin with, to Dickens's early study of Smollett, and was encouraged by the fact that the book did not appear all at once, but in monthly parts, exactly suited the young writer. His wonderful power of observation had enabled him to store up a huge supply of memories of odd types, characters, and scenes of contemporary life; his splendid joy in existence gave him the power to represent them with glorious zest and energy; and his freedom of scope allowed him just the opportunity he needed. On to the pages of *Pickwick* he poured one vivid impression after another, not looking forward, we may safely imagine, and without any definite plan, but riotously rejoicing in the endless flood of fun and humour. In this, his greatest book, he unloads his mind of the impressions left by his youth, just as Shakespeare, in the comic scenes of *Henry IV.*, threw forth all his experiences of the low life of the London of his time. Dickens, indeed, almost equals Shakespeare's comic

masterpiece. He is hardly behind his predecessor in dash and swing and in sheer rollicking merriment. He is only out-distanced by Shakespeare's power of construction and his ability to transfuse his humour with thought. *Pickwick*, in fact, contains no portrait so profound and philosophical as that of Falstaff.

The book is the measure alike of Dickens's abilities and character. In all his later work those elements which delight us are elements which made for *Pickwick's* success—keen observation, joyous humour, huge energy; those qualities which weary and repel—false pathos, poor construction, affectedly fine writing, a tendency to caricature character instead of portraying it—are qualities for which *Pickwick* left no room, or which its scheme made natural and serviceable. And from its pages we can arrive at Dickens himself, the genial man of many and varied friends, the lover of conviviality and of queer company; a character of great humanity and great charm, but wanting a little in refinement, in good taste, and in understanding of life's deepest experiences and mysteries.

Of the many books that followed (far too many for us to dwell on them here), none is without its delightful passages; into all Dickens put some of his very self, and much from his rich treasury of knowledge. He wrote love-stories, such as *David Copperfield*; he criticised the English Poor Law in *Oliver Twist*; English economics in *Hard Times*; he essayed the historical romance in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*; and all of them are novels to be read, and to be read often. But none of them is so great and so perfect as his first success, because in that he was freer

from the conventional bonds of fiction. He is less a great novelist, perhaps, than a great "draughtsman from the life." He is at his best when he can throw off sketch after sketch, and need not think about combining them into a picture.

And now we may go back to *Pickwick* once more, to tell how, when Dickens's first illustrator had died, and he was looking for an artist to carry on the work, there came to his chambers a young man with a folio of drawings, whose name was William Makepeace Thackeray. The drawings proved unsuitable, but the meeting began a friendship of rather a curious and interrupted sort. It was not a great and tender friendship such as bound Tennyson to Browning, but a friendship of men with very little in common, and with a certain sense of rivalry—of men full of admiration for each other's merits and good qualities, but always separated by a mutual belief that the other was working along the wrong lines. Thackeray, sometimes a little suspicious of Dickens's sincerity, sums it up very well, and adds a very fine piece of criticism. He writes of Dickens: "He knows that my books are a protest against him—that if one set are true, the other must be false. But *Pickwick* is an exception; it is a capital book. It is like a glass of good English ale."

We must not, of course, think that by these words Thackeray meant that he deliberately wrote "against" Dickens. No such idea occurred to him. He only means that if his quieter, less coloured, and sadder picture of life is a just one, that of his rival cannot be wholly true. He had, moreover, his moments of almost boyish delight in Dickens's novels, and would,

in his generous way, burst out with vigorous praise of them. Thus he writes to a friend: "How beautiful it (*David Copperfield*) is! how charmingly fresh and simple! In those admirable touches of humour—and I shall call humour, Bob, a mixture of love and wit—who can equal this great genius? There are little words and phrases in his books which are like personal benefits to the reader." And he more than once expressed to Dickens himself his cordial admiration.

But for all that the two men never came into the closest intimacy. They met, had friends in common, and, though a coldness latterly came between them, a reconciliation took place before Thackeray's death. Still, there was always so profound a difference of character, education, and point of view, that they could never have stood very near to each other. We shall understand this better as we hear more of Thackeray's life and work.

He was born in 1811 in India, the son of an important Civil servant, and, after coming to this country as a child, was educated at Charterhouse School (then in London), and later at Trinity College, Cambridge. His University career was short and academically undistinguished, but it brought him into connection with a wonderful set which included Tennyson, Fitzgerald, Spedding, Monckton Milnes, and other young men of future fame. Moreover, it gave him literary practice as contributor to more than one University magazine. He left Cambridge after a year's residence, travelled on the Continent, dabbled in journalism, and trifled with art. He only began to live seriously, indeed, when money losses and an early marriage

compelled him to become a breadwinner. At first he followed the profession of a painter (we have already seen how in this way he met with Dickens), but he drifted gradually into journalism, and contributed to *Fraser's Magazine* his famous *Barry Lyndon*—the autobiography of an Irish swindler—and to *Punch* his *Book of Snobs*. His earlier efforts, however, failed to bring him much reward, and, when he began his monthly numbers of *Vanity Fair*, in 1847, he was still comparatively an unknown man. The book was an immediate success. We will pause over it, as we did over *Pickwick*, and attempt to gather from it some idea of its author's genius and character.

And first we shall be struck by its great unlikeness to Dickens's masterpiece. Here are none of the jolly and varied adventures of good friends on a continuous holiday, no vivid descriptions of quaint life and character in town and country, no scenes that make us lay down the book and give way to helpless laughter. This is the story of two girls, Rebecca Sharpe and Amelia Sedley, from their entrance into the world of society till their middle age. It passes amid usual, even commonplace, surroundings; is enlivened by no striking adventures, by only one really dramatic scene; and is told very quietly and with frequent pauses, during which the narrator comments upon his characters and their doings. Nobody throughout is very good (for Amelia is marred by an almost wilful silliness); nobody is very bad (for Rebecca has her qualities). Through every one of his "puppets," as he loved to call them, Thackeray seems teaching the lesson that life is a perplexing and disappointing experience, that human nature is an inextricable tangle

of good and evil, and that the chief need of men and women in a vain and hard world is singleness of soul and mutual tolerance.

Yet the book remains one of the greatest in our tongue, perhaps even the greatest piece of fiction we possess. It is outwardly shapeless enough, but the perfect development of its two chief characters gives it a singleness of interest, a unity, as the critics say, of its own. Moreover, around the two central figures moves a world of extraordinary reality, the world of middle and upper class life in England during the earlier years of the nineteenth century. Thackeray's canvas is not so bright or so varied as that of Dickens, but it is quite as wide, and the faces that look out from it have far less the appearance of caricatures. *Vanity Fair*, also, is the first novel in which Thackeray really "got himself on to paper," and thoroughly expressed his view of life. *Barry Lyndon*, *The Book of Snobs*, and his other early writings, would lend some support to the silly statement that he was a mere "cynic" or disbeliever in good. Any honest reader of *Vanity Fair* must dismiss that idea for ever, must recognise how human and tender is the spirit that broods over this tangled play of character, and finds something even in his worst "puppets" to sympathise with and to pity.

From the book the man stands out very clearly; above all, a sad man, but not a morose or a bitter one, and one gifted with a wonderful sense of humour, if humour is, as he himself says, "a mixture of wit and love." For of love Thackeray's nature was full—love of women and children and all men of good-will; love, too, of all high endeavours and beautiful deeds, both

in art and life. Like many another sensitive and affectionate nature, he was afflicted with a certain shyness, and veiled it under an air of coldness and reserve. We read not long ago Carlyle's fine study of Tennyson; let us follow it now with his portrait of Thackeray, whom also he loved and respected: "He is a big fellow, soul and body, of many gifts and qualities, particularly in the Hogarth line, with a dash of Sterne superadded, of enormous appetite withal, and very uncertain and chaotic in all points, except his outer breeding, which is fixed enough, and *perfect* according to the modern English style."

Such a man might well have friends who cherished and admired him, and Thackeray's circle was a large and distinguished one. His Cambridge companions, however, were the most treasured of all. Monckton Milnes was his chosen comrade and consoler in the dark years that came before his success. "Old Brooks," Tennyson's "Old Brooks," and Edward FitzGerald he loved with a profound and brotherly affection; for Tennyson himself he had not only fondness, but veneration as well. "Dear old Alfred," he called him, and rejoiced in his triumphs as if they were his own. His correspondence shows him as among the greatest and sincerest of our letter-writers. The letters to Mrs. Brookfield are especially a revelation of perfect friendship between man and woman.

If Dickens never reached the charmed circle of his intimates, he had perhaps more influence upon a part of his work than any of his closer friends. Thackeray liked to think that he had reacted upon his great contemporary. Writing to Mrs. Brookfield, he says: "In the first place, it pleases the other author (himself) to

see that Dickens, who has long left off alluding to the A's works, has been copying the O. A., and greatly simplifying his style, and overcoming the use of fine words. By this the public will be the gainer, and *David Copperfield* will be improved by taking a lesson from *Vanity Fair*. Secondly, it has put me upon my metal." That Dickens profited much by Thackeray's example we may doubt; but in the novel Thackeray then (1849) had in hand—his *Pendennis*—there are evident traces of the Dickens influence. Thackeray goes nearer to caricature in this than in any of his other novels; he shows a desire to prove himself acquainted with the poorer classes and with low life in London; he displays a tendency to melodrama in developing his story. It is hardly fanciful that these strange elements in his work are due to his desire to meet his rival upon his own ground. In the novels that followed—*Esmond* (1852), the fine flower of historical romances; *The Newcomes* (1853), another elaborate and truthful picture of contemporary English society, and some minor works—he wisely avoided the attempt.

If Smollett is the "father" of Dickens, Thackeray is certainly the own "son" of Fielding. He has the same broad and tolerant view over life, the same love for humanity, the same tenderness for women. Both men knew well the social world of their day, and painted it in strong though quiet colouring. But Thackeray infinitely surpasses Fielding and every other English novelist in moral and spiritual force. His creed was certainly a vague one, and resulted rather from the experience of his heart than the reasoning of his head; but it was real and far-reaching in its influ-

ence. To Mrs. Brookfield he expressed it with great beauty and clearness: "The bounties of the Father I believe to be countless and inexhaustible for most of us here in life; Love the greatest. Art (which is an exquisite and admiring sense of Nature) the next. By Jove! I'll admire, if I can, the wing of a cock-sparrow as much as the pinion of an archangel, and adore God, the Father of the earth, first, waiting for the completion of my senses, and the fulfilment of His intentions towards me afterwards, when this scene closes over us."

These are hardly the words of a man embittered by life and anxious to deny the goodness of man and of creation. No finer defence of him has been written than the lines which celebrated him in *Punch* on his death in 1863.

"He was a cynic! By his life all wrought
Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle ways;
His heart wide open to all kindly thought,
His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise!
He was a cynic! You might read it writ
In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair,
In those blue eyes with childlike candour lit,
In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear.
He was a cynic! By the love that clung
About him from his children, friends, and kin;
By the sharp pain light pen and gossip tongue
Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within."

Whatever their rivalries and misunderstandings, Dickens and Thackeray will always stand together as a common influence upon subsequent fiction. Each in his own day had his school of disciples and followers, the most successful imitator of Dickens probably being William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), who followed his master in his use of caricature, and showed an even

stronger tendency to melodramatic situations; while Thackeray's ablest junior was certainly Anthony Trollope (1815-1882), who "specialised," as it were, in the description of country and ecclesiastical society. Each, too, has his direct "school" to-day. But their force has really acted in one direction—to the freeing of the novel from false Romanticism, and the enabling of it to keep abreast with our changing civilisation. Each in his way taught that passion and experience are as real and as valuable in fustian, tweed, and broad-cloth as in armour and mechlin; each claimed to discuss large questions of conduct; each, in different fashion, developed the power of dialogue as a key to character. That the novel is truly alive to-day, and, in the hands of thoughtful men, always finding new material and expressing a new criticism of life, is largely due to these two leaders who, despite of dissensions in life, could yet respect and admire each other, and in death are not divided.

CHAPTER XXI

ROSSETTI, MORRIS, AND SWINBURNE

WHILE Tennyson and Browning made it their object to face the intellectual and spiritual problems of their day, and to find a place for them in poetry, the man who heads the group we are now to consider stood quite aloof from contemporary thought, in a world of his own creation. He may fitly remind us of the speaker in Tennyson's *Palace of Art*, who, in the pursuit of literary and artistic culture, lost touch with the greater life of men, and suffered accordingly. Certainly, as we shall see, Rossetti paid a great penalty for the narrowness of his outlook.

He was born in London in 1828 of nearly pure Italian parentage. His father was a Neapolitan patriot, poet, and exile for freedom's sake; and of Rossetti's brothers and sisters one at least, Christina (1830-1894), possessed the poetic gift to a very high degree. Dante Gabriel (as our poet was named) rhymed from childhood, and in quite early youth produced work of great originality and beauty. *The Blessed Damozel*, exquisite both in rhythm and language, was written before he was twenty, and though he was by then widely read, and steeped in Shakespeare, Dante, Shelley, and Keats, this yearning appeal of a dead girl in heaven to the soul of her lover upon earth shows hardly a

trace of outside influence. For the sake of our literature, it is a pity that by the time this beautiful piece of work was composed Rossetti was already an art-student, and that for the rest of his life he was less poet than painter. This, however, is now past regret, and as his painting had a profound influence upon his poetry, we must pause to speak a little about it.

If we read any account of Rossetti, we shall find frequently used in it the words "Pre-Raphaelite" and "Pre-Raphaelitism." We cannot now, of course, pause to explain either at all fully. It must be enough to say that the painters of the Pre-Raphaelite school disliked not only the manner of contemporary English art (then, except in landscape, at a low ebb), but its matter as well. That is, they quarrelled with the subjects chosen by the artists of their day, and also with their colouring, composition, and way of painting in general. Art had become unreal, they claimed, and they desired to return to Nature, and sought inspiration principally from the very early Italian masters—the painters before Raphael, whence comes the name of Pre-Raphaelite. The results of their revolt from the prevailing school was that they adopted various technical devices, and (what is for us much more important) began to take their subjects from medieval legend and history, and from the works of the great medieval writers. They were a talented group, and included, besides Rossetti himself, the painters Millais and Holman Hunt, and the poet-sculptor Woolner.

Upon the poetry of Rossetti, already a lover of Malory, the old ballads, and (to some extent) of Chaucer, this theory of art exercised an enormous influence. *The Blessed Damozel* strongly recalls a

Pre-Raphaelite picture, and much of his best work is deliberately medieval in treatment and in subject. Perhaps this statement is not very easy to understand; but if we turn to his fine narrative poem *Rose Mary*, a story of love, sin, atonement, and magic; to the splendid dramatic ballad of a scorned woman's revenge, *Sister Helen*, and to the description of the sinking of the *White Ship* given by "the butcher of Rouen, poor Berold," we shall realise at once that these stories have not merely a medieval setting. The poet attempts to relate them also from the medieval point of view, and with some suggestion of the medieval way of speech.

We must, however, seek the perfect poetic expression of Rossetti's theories of art, both literary and pictorial, in his great cycle of sonnets, *The House of Life*, where the rich and vivid colouring, the wealth of detail, and the frequent suggestions of Dante and other early Italian poets, give us exactly the impression we receive from his pictures, or those of his great disciple Burne-Jones.

He had other moods and manners, and other influences swayed him from time to time. He was among the earliest and keenest admirers of Browning, and we should guess as much by the two realistic poems, *Jenny* and *A Dying Confession*. But he never made the mistake of imitating Browning's harshness and oddity. His language is rather suggestive of Keats in its gorgeousness and fineness of workmanship, while to Coleridge (whom he came to love above all) he was much indebted for his wonderful skill in verse. Coleridge also appealed to his love of the eerie and supernatural—a very marked feature in his character.

Had Rossetti separated himself less from the ordinary life and thought of his time, and had he written less spasmodically, he might have stood with the very greatest poets of our language. His work nearly always possesses beauty, sometimes strength, and occasionally human interest; but it lacks intellectual force and grip. He probably agreed with the critic who declared that "thought mars perfect beauty," and is fated to remain among our minor singers, because he forgot that, though no poet can arrive at supremacy without style, still less can he arrive there by style alone.

If, however, he fell below the very highest in his actual accomplishment, his power of influencing others was very great. Genial (before ill-health and unhappiness clouded his life), a vigorous and brilliant talker, and with a great gift for dominating his companions, he was the leader of a distinguished group. More than one of his friends was poet as well as artist. We have mentioned Thomas Woolner (1826-1892), whose verse, if slight, is often delightful; and there was also William Bell Scott (1811-1890), who almost rivalled Rossetti in mastery of the difficult sonnet form. Both these writers owed him something; but his most powerful and fruitful influence was exerted over the group of young Oxford men who began to gather around him in 1856, and whose most distinguished members were Burne-Jones, the future painter; William Morris (1834-1896); and Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909).

Morris and Burne-Jones had at Oxford become sworn comrades. Both had gone there as a step to Holy Orders, and both had come under the spell of the High Church movement, with its love of ritual

and its reverence for the Middle Ages as an era of true Catholic faith and practice. Both had made some acquaintance with mediæval literature and art, and both had begun to think that they could serve their generation better as painters than they could as clergymen. From the religious ideas of the pair Swinburne stood quite aloof, but he shared to the full their delight in all things mediæval. Morris at Oxford had already begun to write verse, weak in form, but showing a very original and delicate sense of beauty.

In Rossetti's opinion, at this time, it was the bounden duty of every man to become a painter, if possible, and his encouragement of his two disciples was eager and generous. Friendship ripened very rapidly between them, and they were soon almost daily companions. Both for his work and for his views their reverence was unbounded. They were less his friends, indeed, than his slaves. But in spite of his doctrine that all ideas of beauty were better expressed in line and colour than in verse, Morris persisted in the composition of poetry—an art which came naturally to him, whereas the practice of the brush seems to have had an ill effect upon his temper and his peace of mind. In 1858 appeared his first volume, *The Defence of Guinevere, and Other Poems*.

The book is a remarkable one, and would stamp Morris as a poet of distinction if he had written nothing else. Working upon his natural bias, the Pre-Raphaelite teaching had made his interests and views predominantly mediæval, and most of the poems are based upon his reading of Malory, or of the great French chronicler Froissart. Rossetti's influence is very marked. But over and over again in these pages we come upon lines

and passages that owe nothing to Rossetti, nothing to Malory, Froissart, or Chaucer, but are the expression of Morris's peculiar genius. Often we are struck by a sudden simplicity which renders the poet's thought and mood far clearer to us than could the greatest wealth of language. At times this simplicity approaches the poignant bareness of the great dramatists. An example of this is the terrible story of *The Haystack in the Floods*, though *Summer Dawn* has more of real beauty, as well as showing that strange wistfulness which is another characteristic of Morris's work.

One might guess from this volume that its author was not a man likely to remain long content within the rather narrow circle of Rossetti's ideas. About Morris was a vigorous and healthy manliness that must revolt eventually from any external influence whatever, the more so from one so largely based on a mannerism as was that of the older poet. He was, on the one hand, of a more sympathetic imagination than his master; on the other, he was much more sincere in his worship of things medieval. It has been said of him that he "walked out of the Middle Ages," and there is a good deal of truth in the remark. For him the perfect life was always that of medieval village or township living on its own land and by its own simple industries. The socialism of his later life was really only the result of his desire to return to these conditions, and his songs of revolt might have been sung by the men who followed Wat Tyler and John Ball. Medievalism, indeed, coloured all his writings. His story from Greek legend, *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867); the great medley of tales with a prologue suggested by Chaucer, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-70); his translations from Virgil

and Homer; his versions of old Norse poetry; and his beautiful prose romances. But the medievalism of these later works bears but little trace of Rossetti's power over him. He models himself far more directly upon Chaucer ("the summer poet," as he lovingly named him) and Malory as time goes on. Rossetti and he, in fact, were too self-centred and too unlike for abiding friendship, and though they did not part definitely till a quarrel over business separated them in 1875, they had long before that ceased to be pupil and master.

To Rossetti, however, Morris stood under a very great debt. The older man certainly helped the younger to come to a knowledge of his own abilities, and to find a means of expressing his poetic ideas. This debt is not lessened by the fact that as Morris came to realise the bent of his genius he preferred his own methods to those of his former friend. It is only sad to think that men who had been in such complete accord should have been parted by sordid considerations of money, and that, when, in 1882, Rossetti ended a life that had passed into deepest shadow, the noblest of his "sons" should not have stood at his death-bed.

With all its beauty, Morris's work has obvious failings. It is often diffuse, often loose and careless, often gives us the impression that verse came too easy to him, and that he abused the facility. He would have done well had he followed the example of his early master more closely in his habit of careful revision.

As Rossetti lost the allegiance of Morris, so did he that of his other great poetic disciple. Swinburne, indeed, never belonged so wholly to the Pre-Raphaelite school as did his Oxford friend. He loved the colour

and vigour of medieval life and literature, but from medieval ideas of morality and religion his whole spirit was in revolt. Consequently, when he treated of medieval subjects, he was never quite whole-hearted or at ease. His imitation of a Greek tragedy, *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), and his first series of *Poems and Ballads* (1866), bear abundant traces of Rossetti's influence. But the results of this influence are curiously uncharacteristic of the writer. Swinburne could consciously put himself aside and assume Rossetti's manner; but he could not use that manner to express his most individual views and feelings. As a consequence, his earlier work contains a certain number of poems and passages of poems of a deliberately Pre-Raphaelite kind, while we find his inmost soul displayed in pieces of quite other quality. His fierce love of freedom, his power of ringing verse, his profound scholarship, are his own property; and in all his work of early manhood we find almost as much of Browning, Chaucer, Morris, and the classics, as we do of Rossetti. After this time there is but little evidence of the painter-poet's influence at all. As he and Rossetti drifted apart, there is a certain loss of glow and vigour in his work; but Morris believed this due to the fact that his inspiration was always mainly literary, in simpler speech, that he cared for books too much and for life too little, and tended to rely less and less on human nature as a model. Very likely this is the correct view. Certainly his later poetry fails only too often to seem spontaneous and sincere. Yet he is so *very* nearly among the great poets of our tongue. His metrical skill, his great power over language, his wide range of subject—all these qualities combine to make

us feel that he is quite above the minor singers. Yet when we compare him with the acknowledged masters we can scarcely include him in their fellowship. Perhaps he stands in a class of his own. At any rate, one or two of his elegies, some of his love-songs, and many of his poems to children, are likely to live with the best of their kind. They will certainly survive his lengthy narrative poems on the Arthurian legend, and his interminable tragedies.

The three poets together started a movement which may be called "a minor Romantic revival," a revolt against convention and meaningless classicism. Their immediate disciples and successors were innumerable, and did much to bring them into ridicule by servile and exaggerated imitation of their mannerisms. We must never forget, however, that we owe them a great increase of the field of poetry, and a very great deal of positive beauty. If they have as yet no descendants worthily to maintain their teaching (and who knows what the future may bring?), this gift of beauty is, as Keats says, "a joy for ever," and we may remember Browning's words:

"If you get simple beauty, and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents."

LIST OF LEADING AUTHORS MENTIONED

- ADDISON, JOSEPH (1672-1719): Essayist, poet, and political writer. One of the followers of Dryden in the simplification of English prose, and a forerunner of the novelists by his studies of character.
- AUSTEN, JANE (1775-1817): Satirical novelist of English middle-class manners. Her great qualities are wit, sense of form, and power to create character.
- BEAUMONT, FRANCIS (1584-1616): Writer of plays in collaboration with Fletcher. Though of Shakespeare's school, this famous pair had far less constructive gift than their great master, and appealed much more exclusively to the Court circle.
- BERNERS, LORD (1467-1533): One of the makers of English prose, and one of our greatest translators.
- BLAKE, WILLIAM (1757-1827): Painter, visionary, and poet. His songs have a piercing simplicity which gives them great character, and marks him out from the artificial writers of his age.
- BOSWELL, JAMES (1740-1795): The author of *The Life of Johnson*, the greatest biography of our literature, and a matchless picture of life in the eighteenth century.
- BROWNE, SIR THOMAS (c. 1605-1682): The greatest master of the ornate and complicated prose of the seventeenth century, and a great influence on the "Romantic" prose of the nineteenth.
- BROWNING, ROBERT (1812-1889): Perhaps the most original poet of his age. Remarkable by profound learning, philosophical power, and insight into human character. His work is marred by harshness and obscurity of style.
- BUNYAN, JOHN (1628-1688): Writer of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which, by its union of action, dialogue, and character, may claim to be the first English novel, as *Euphues* is the first romance.

- BURKE, EDMUND (1729-1797): Orator and political writer. Master of a style which represented a movement from the plain prose of Addison, Steele, etc., towards something more sonorous and dignified.
- BURNS, ROBERT (1759-1796): Peasant and poet. With Shakespeare as a lyric writer. Preserved the old tradition of the Scottish song, and made ready for the Romantics.
- BURTON, ROBERT (1577-1640): Prose-writer of a very learned and curious kind. His work had later a great influence on Lamb.
- BUTLER, SAMUEL (1612-1680): Writer of a burlesque of *Don Quixote*, *Hudibras*, directed against the Puritans.
- BYRON, GEORGE GORDON LORD (1788-1824): Poet and lover of freedom. Satirised English conventions and smugness. Popularised the poetic treatment of travel, of Eastern adventure, and of self-centred melancholy.
- CAXTON, WILLIAM (c. 1422-1491): Brought the printing-press to England, and did something for English prose by his prefaces and translations.
- CHATTERTON, THOMAS (1752-1770): Writer of poems supposed to date from the late Middle Ages. By his subject and metrical manner he influenced Coleridge, Keats, and several later Romantics.
- CHAUCEER, GEOFFREY (c. 1340-1400): "Father of English poetry." Adapted to our language the French metres. Put English poetry in touch with the higher art of France and of Italy, and left us a splendid picture of English medieval life.
- COLERIDGE, SAMUEL TAYLOR (1772-1834): With Wordsworth, the first of our great "Romantic" poets. A supreme master of metre and of the poetry of the magical and weird. A great critic and thinker, and the moulder of younger minds.
- COLLINS, WILLIAM (1721-1759): Poet. Broke away from the "correct" school of Pope alike in metre and in choice of "Romantic" subject-matter.
- CONGREVE, WILLIAM (1670-1729): The wittiest of the so-called "Restoration dramatists," and an influence on the subsequent history of high comedy. His tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*, was greatly admired by critics of the "correct" school, but he lives to-day by his comedies of manners.
- COWPER, WILLIAM (1731-1800): Poet of Nature, domestic life, and religion. Translated Homer's *Iliad*.

- CRASHAW, RICHARD (c. 1613-1649): Religious poet of the quaint and conceited kind, but with flashes of splendid feeling and expression.
- DEFOE, DANIEL (1661-1731): Writer of realistic stories, which influenced the history of the novel. A great journalist.
- DE QUINCEY, THOMAS (1785-1859): Miscellaneous writer and great master of modern poetic prose.
- DICKENS, CHARLES (1812-1870): The greatest English novelist of low life and of farcical adventure. A superb draughtsman of characters of a rather exceptional kind.
- DONNE, JOHN (1573-1631): A poet who broke away from the Elizabethan traditions to begin the obscure and difficult way of writing called by Johnson "metaphysical."
- DRYDEN, JOHN (1631-1700): The inventor of true satire, the reformer of English prose, and the "father" of English criticism.
- DUNBAR, WILLIAM (c. 1460-1520): Scottish Court poet, who followed the tradition of Chaucer.
- FIELDING, HENRY (1707-1754): The greatest of the eighteenth-century novelists, and "father" of Thackeray.
- FITZGERALD, EDWARD (1809-1883): Translator of Persian poem by Omar Khayyám, of plays by Calderon, and a delightful letter-writer.
- FLETCHER, JOHN (1579-1625): Cf. Beaumont.
- FORD, JOHN (fl. c. 1613-1633): The last great tragedian of the Elizabethan school.
- GAY, JOHN (1685-1732): Society poet and author of the famous *Beggar's Opera*.
- GIBBON, EDWARD (1737-1794): One of our greatest historians and writers of dignified prose.
- GOLDSMITH, OLIVER (1728-1774): Poet, playwright, essayist, novelist, etc. A versatile and delightful writer, whose best work lay perhaps in his witty comedies and his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*.
- GOWER, JOHN (c. 1325-1408): Narrative poet.
- GRAY, THOMAS (1716-1771): Author of a small amount of poetry remarkable for its high finish and exquisite art. He was of "Romantic" tendencies as a metrist, and in his love of subjects drawn from medieval history and from Norse Legends. His *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* is the most perfect example of a sort of poetry much cultivated by eighteenth-century writers.

- GREENE, ROBERT (c. 1560-1592): A predecessor of Shakespeare.
- HAZLITT, WILLIAM (1778-1830): Critic and essayist. Did much to popularise our older writers.
- HENRYSON, ROBERT (fl. c. 1462): The greatest of the Scottish disciples of Chaucer.
- HERBERT, GEORGE (1593-1633): Poet of Anglican piety.
- HERRICK, ROBERT (1591-1674): Lyric poet.
- HOWARD, HENRY, EARL OF SURREY (c. 1517-1547): With Wyatt prepared the way for Elizabethan poetry.
- HUNT, HENRY JAMES LEIGH (1784-1859): Critic, minor poet, essayist, and political writer. A strong "Romantic" in ideas and tendencies. Influenced Keats in his use of the rhyming couplet, and in his interest in Italian subjects (e.g., *Isabella*) and old English literature.
- JOHNSON, SAMUEL (1709-1784): Critic, scholar, essayist, and writer of verse. Did much, with Burke and Gibbon, for the restoration of dignity to English prose. Type of the later eighteenth century in his common sense, his distrust of Romanticism, and his love of social life.
- JONSON, BEN (c. 1573-1637): Dramatist, poet, and critic. A forerunner of the "classical and correct" school of writers. A lasting influence on English comedy, and the master of the Cavalier lyric poets.
- KEATS, JOHN (1795-1821): A poet of great achievement and almost unbounded promise. Unites the "Romantic" sentiment with the Greek love of beauty and the Renaissance passion for luxury.
- KYD, THOMAS (c. 1558-1594): Writer of crude melodramas, which had some influence upon the art of Shakespeare.
- LAMB, CHARLES (1775-1834): Essayist, critic, and minor poet. A great master of the descriptive and rambling essay. A great master of a prose style, showing many traces of the seventeenth-century writers. Helped, with Hazlitt and Coleridge, to renew interest in our older literature, especially that of the theatre.
- LANGLAND, WILLIAM (c. 1332-1400): Author of *The Vision concerning Piers the Plowman*, a great satire upon mediæval life and corruption. In a way the "father" of English social satire.
- LOVELACE, RICHARD (1618-1658): Cavalier lyric poet of great grace and charm.
- LYDGATE, JOHN (c. 1370-1446): Poet of moderate ability and writer of tedious verse romances. Of Chaucer's school, in a way, without Chaucer's beauty, humour, and style.

- LYLY, JOHN (c. 1554-1606): Novelist and playwright. Founded English fiction with his *Euphues*, and began a mannerism of style which long influenced both prose and verse.
- MALORY, SIR THOMAS (c. 1400-1471): Author of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a great romance built up on the various Arthurian stories. A great stylist and master of form. One of our greatest literary influences.
- MARLOWE, CHRISTOPHER (1564-1593): Playwright and poet. First used blank verse effectively on the stage, and began a type of drama appealing to all classes. A poet of great beauty and nobility. Opened the way for Shakespeare, among whose predecessors he is much the most important.
- MILTON, JOHN (1608-1674): Unites the spirit of the Renaissance and the spirit of Puritanism. The greatest of our learned poets and of the "sons" of Spenser. A supreme master of metre and of lofty imagination, and one of our most lasting and important literary influences.
- MORRIS, WILLIAM (1834-1896): Poet and writer of prose romances. A man who loved, understood, and interpreted to us moderns the Middle Ages better than any other.
- NASH, THOMAS (1567-1601): One of the university group of dramatists, poets, and pamphleteers of Elizabeth's age.
- OCCLEVE, THOMAS (c. 1368-1450): Disciple of Chaucer.
- PARNELL, THOMAS (1679-1718): Poet with "Romantic" tendencies, friend of Pope and Swift.
- PEELE, GEORGE (c. 1558-1598): Predecessor of Shakespeare and member of University group of writers.
- POPE, ALEXANDER (1688-1744): Dryden's greatest successor as satirist. Established the "classical and correct" tradition. Great master of pointed verse, and of a very literary style. Influenced English literature for nearly a century.
- PRIOR, MATTHEW (1664-1721): Delightful writer of light verse.
- RICHARDSON, SAMUEL (1689-1761): May be called "the father of the modern English novel" because of his union of the Romantic interest of passion with the circumstances of daily life.
- ROSSETTI, DANTE GABRIEL (1828-1862). Poet. A great master of the sonnet and of all metrical effects and devices. By his love of medieval subjects and treatment he inaugurated the style of literature known as Pre-Raphaelite. Influenced Morris, Swinburne, etc.

- SCOTT, SIR WALTER (1771-1832): Novelist and poet. Our greatest master of the historical and picturesque novel. A splendid portrayer of Scottish life and character. His verse-tales and ballads had as much popularity as his prose, but far less merit and lasting influence.
- SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM (1564-1616): Our supreme poet and dramatist. Even more than Spenser he represented the English mind of the Elizabethan age; but he is "for all time," both as actual artist and as a literary influence. He exhausted completely the possibilities of poetic drama.
- SHELLEY, PERCY BYSSHE (1792-1822): A great lyric poet of the later "Romantic" group, and a spirit of the highest nobility and power. In intellect perhaps unmatched by any, certainly unsurpassed.
- SHERIDAN, RICHARD BRINSLEY (1751-1816): Delightful writer of social comedies.
- SIDNEY, SIR PHILIP (1554-1586): Poet, critic, and writer of romance. An excellent sonneteer and lyric singer. His prose style is uninfluenced by euphuism, which he disliked, but has its own affectation. His sonnets did a great deal to spread the silly Elizabethan rage for sonnet-cycles.
- SMOLLETT, TOBIAS (1721-1771): Novelist of wandering and low life. The precursor of Dickens.
- SPENSER, EDMUND (c. 1552-1599): The most refined and delicate poet of the Elizabethan age, reflecting all its noblest aspiration and devotion. He probably has influenced more later poets than any other, especially in their youth.
- STEELE, SIR RICHARD (1672-1729): Essayist and playwright. Collaborator, with Addison, in *Tatler* and *Spectator*, though of a warmer temperament than his friend.
- STERNE, LAURENCE (1713-1768): Novelist of sensibility and sentimentalism.
- SUCKLING, SIR JOHN (1609-1642): Lyric poet of Cavalier group.
- SWIFT, JONATHAN (1667-1745): Satirist and political writer. Master of the strongest and most pointed prose style of any man of his time.
- SWINBURNE, ALGERNON CHARLES (1837-1909). Poet. A great metrist. At times almost a great poet.
- TENNYSON, ALFRED, LORD (1809-1892): The most representative poet of the Victorian age.

- THACKERAY, WILLIAM MAKEPEACE (1811-1863): A novelist of remarkable insight and power. His picture of Victorian society is a superb one. His closest literary kinsman is Fielding.
- THOMSON, JAMES (1700-1748): Did much by his *Seasons* and his Spenserian *Castle of Indolence* to keep alive Romance in the chill air of the eighteenth century.
- UDALL, NICHOLAS (1505-1556): Early writer of comedy.
- VANBURGH, SIR JOHN (1666-1726): Comic dramatist of the Congreve school.
- VAUGHAN, HENRY (1622-1695): Writer of religious verse, of a mystical type.
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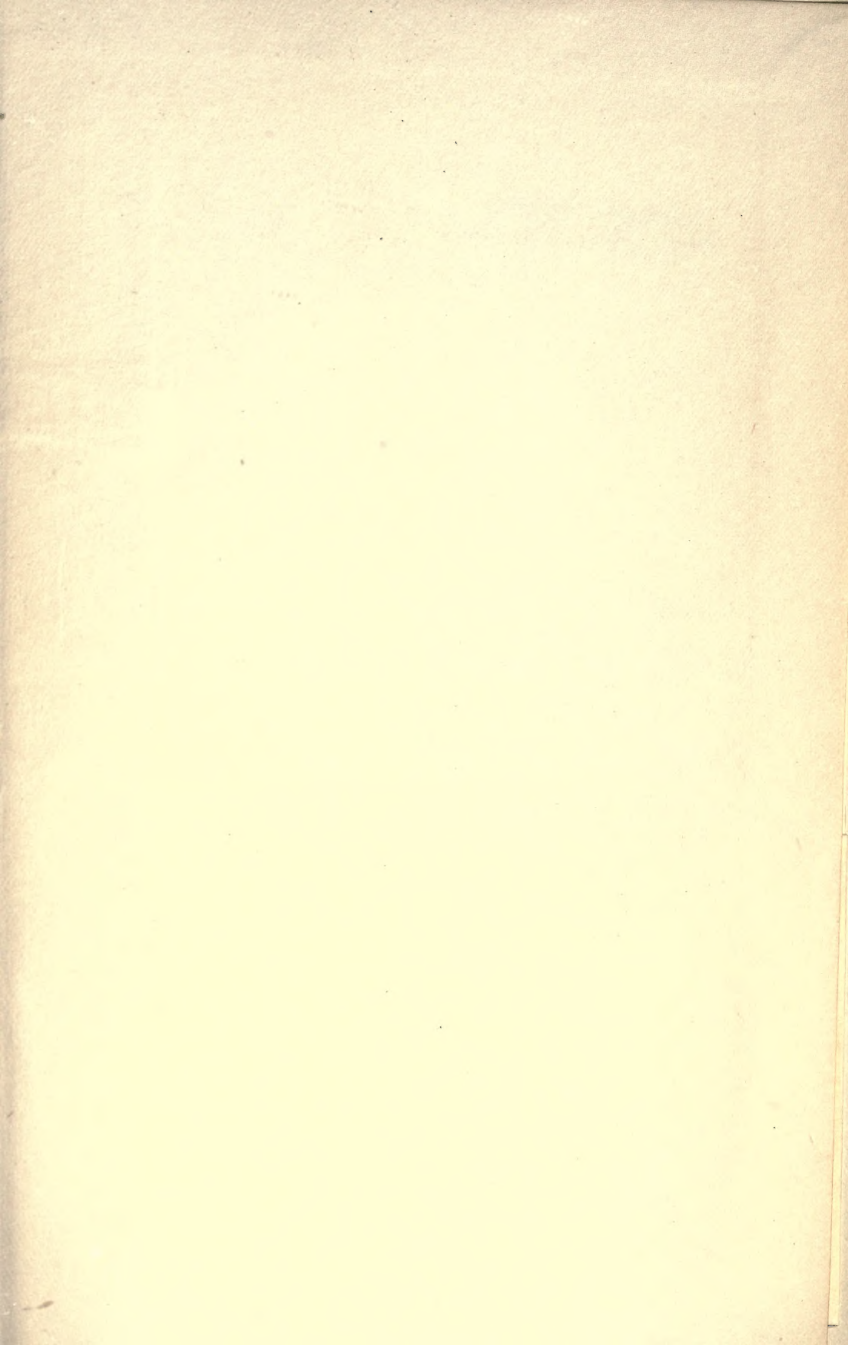
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